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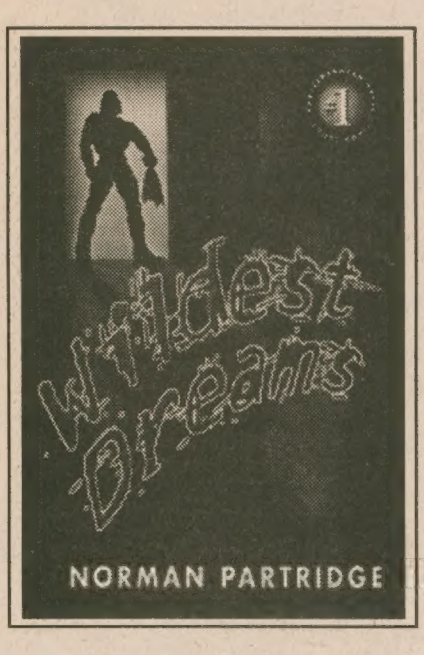

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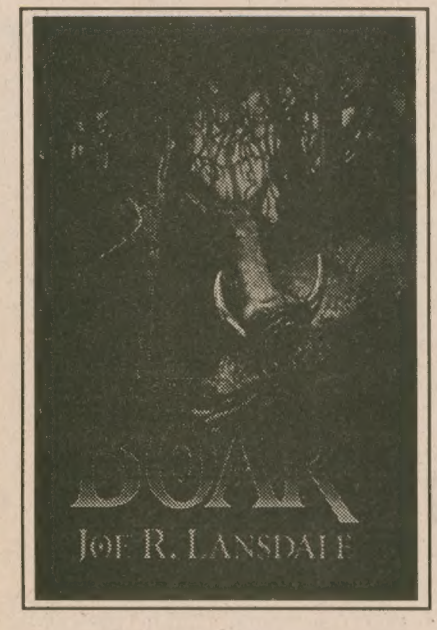

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"This happened in the summer of 1933 in the Sabine River Bottoms of East Texas. Those that still remember call it the year of The Devil Boar.

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CEMETERY DANCE MAGAZINE
Volume 8, Issue 4

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ISSN
1047-7675

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WORDS FROM THE EDITOR

RICHARD T. CHIZMAR

CD#29 – Welcome back to another issue of *Cemetery Dance*, the magazine of dark mystery, suspense, and horror. If you have picked us up from a book or specialty store and are reading us for the very first time . . . we hope you enjoy this issue enough to subscribe or keep an eye out for the next issue of *Cemetery Dance*.

MAJOR ANNOUNCEMENT!!!!

Beginning with the next issue, *Cemetery Dance* will go to a bi-monthly schedule. That's right. We'll be bringing you six issues a year instead of four, with no increase in the cover price!

Why? Freedom. Going to the accelerated schedule will let us do some things we've been talking about – adding columnists (one of whom debuts a bit early in this issue), making the reviews and features more timely, and best of all, publishing more fiction. As well as increasing frequency, we're adjusting the print size to cram more into each issue. We have in inventory long stories by Douglas Clegg and Kristine Kathryn Rusch, original fiction by Joe R. Lansdale, *CD*-favorite Norman Partridge, Al Sarrantonio, and Hugh B. Cave, to name just a few.

That's not all! We'll also be doing some things impossible until now: publishing a short novel on the installment plan, with a cliffhanger in each issue; assembling a theme issue, on California writers of the fantastic. Legendary names like Harlan Ellison, William F. Nolan, Charles Beaumont, George Clayton Johnson, and Richard Matheson will all be in it.

So, look for the subscription information in here, and you won't miss an issue of what promises to be our most exciting year yet!

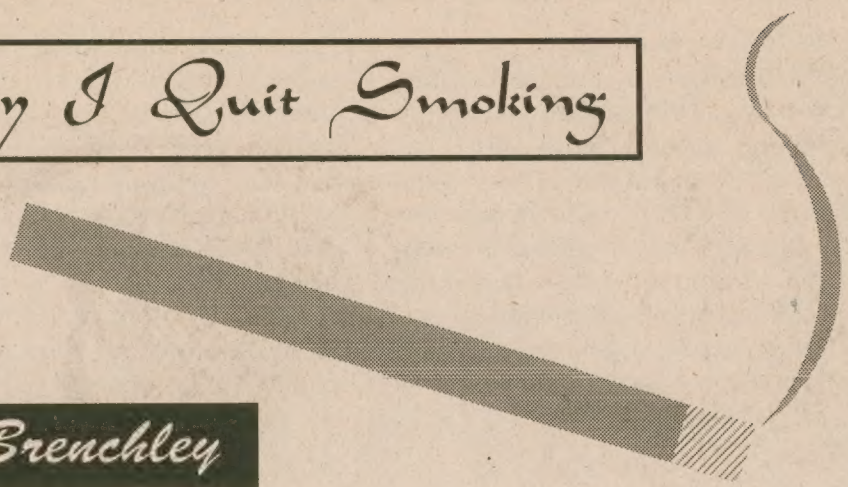
There's more! By the time you read this, we'll also have established an email newsletter, in conjunction with Subterranean Press. You'll see an ad in here if you look, but the short version: it'll be the best way to stay on top of CD and SubPress releases, from the moment the contract is signed until the book is in your hands. Special exclusive deals, fiction you won't find anywhere else, and a lot of other features are in the works. Best of all: the newsletter is FREE!

Now, a bit of business. We've been preparing for this change for months, soliciting and buying stories at a great rate. So, until March 1, 1999 *Cemetery Dance* is closed to unsolicited submissions. We're working through the last of the current submissions, and should have answers to everyone shortly. Any manuscripts arriving before the the re-opening date will be returned unread. Sorry, but we have so much to concentrate on right now, with the changes in the magazine, the book line's frantic publication schedule – not to mention my Associate Editor's imprint, which is also gaining momentum – that we wouldn't be able to give them the attention they deserve. So, just to make sure it's crystal, make-no-mistakes clear, please do **NOT** send us any unsolicited stories until March 1, 1999. If you do, well, you'll have to sit this dance out . . .

That's all for now. It's time to enjoy the issue! And please remember that Ingram Periodicals is *Cemetery Dance*'s newsstand distributor. If you frequent a chain store – or an independent book or comic store – please ask the manager to carry *Cemetery Dance*. Thanks – as always, we appreciate the help and support!

Now, turn down the lights, flip the page, take my hand, and start the dance . . .

The Day I Quit Smoking



Chaz Brenchley

Chaz Brenchley is the acclaimed author of *Paradise, Dead of Light,* and *Light Errant. Tower of the King's Daughter,* first in a new fantasy series, is just out. Unfortunately, his works are only published in the UK.

It's four months now, since I quit smoking. To the day, and almost to the hour.

Don't misunderstand me, I'm not triumphant about that. I'm not one of these born-again tobacco-haters. It was something I did because it seemed like a good idea, that's all.

It's the same reason I committed my first murder, maybe. And the same date, the same time, more or less. Give or take. It hasn't happened yet, the murder, but that's when I committed it. That's why the day and the time are stuck so firmly four-square in my mind, why I can still count the hours since my last cigarette.

•

I hadn't been smoking long in any case, only a few months. Not long enough to hurt. It had been a snap decision to start, a gesture of defiance to the world, the fates and my husband Alan, not necessarily in that order.

Stopping was a snap decision too, spur of the moment. Like the murder — or the maybe murder, I should say, the possibility of murder. I can't be any more certain than that, until it happens. It's the doubt that makes it perfect, really: the fear in his mind, the constant waiting, the never being safe. That's how murder ought to be, slow and sweet and vicious.

•

It only happened because I was so new to smoking, because I wasn't organised yet. I just wasn't taking it that seriously, I suppose; so I kept running out, I always had to scrounge a light off strangers, and of course I never could remember to take my cigarettes with me when I left. I was constantly having to ring the doorbell again, pop back in, "Sorry, forgot my fags, that's them on the table there . . ."

And that's what happened that day four months ago. It wasn't the first thing that happened, naturally — it couldn't be, by definition. And it wasn't the last thing either, the murder came after that, hot on its heels as you might say; but it was the crucial thing, the pivotal event. I forgot my fags, and went back for them; and so I become a murderer, and a man dies.

Maybe.

•

It was a whim, another sudden decision that took me to see Alan that Sunday afternoon. That's the way I am, it's how I run my life, doing things on the jump. It's not always a good idea — it's how come I got married, for example; I didn't stop to think, I just said yes, said I love you and yes *please* — but it's what I'm comfortable with. And I haven't noticed other people, the cautious types being any more successful. Take my husband, for example. He's ultra-cautious, he's the ultimate in look-before-you-leapers; but he makes just as many mistakes. He married me, for a start. That was his mistake as much as it was mine, and he's regretting it now, as much as I am.

But anyway, it was Sunday afternoon in term-time: the boys would be at school, Alan would be

down at his riverside workshop, turning out treasures. It was a good time to catch him, to make one last plea for common sense before we got too deeply embroiled in courts and solicitors and such.

So I just jumped in the car and went. Didn't think to ring ahead, though he likely wouldn't have answered if I had, not on a Sunday; hardly even wondered how he'd feel, finding me suddenly and unexpectedly on his doorstep, in his life again, in person. Flesh and blood, when he'd done his very best to reduce me to words on paper, no more than a legal reality . . .

•

Alan's workshop was in an old Victorian warehouse right on the river and just the wrong side of the bridge. Or just the right side, probably, from Alan's point of view. The place had been divided up into a dozen studios way back in the thirties, and it had hardly been touched since. The roof was all leaks and patches, damp was creeping up the walls while mortar flaked away on the outside and plaster peeled within; and the whole structure had adopted a gentle tilt towards the river, as the foundations threatened to slip. A hundred yards further east and it would have come into the redevelopment area, it would have earned itself the demolition it so sorely needed and the mixed bag of artists and sculptors and craftspeople who populated it would have been rehoused in some smart purpose-built space with all the amenities they so sorely lacked at the moment.

Alan would have hated that. He valued things simply because they were aging, he wanted to make everything last. Except our marriage, of course, he was ready to make an exception there.

•

I parked on the steep slope of the access road, and walked round to the door into Alan's workshop. There was his car, and the door stood open; I could hear the hum of machinery inside. That was his lathe, and no point knocking: he'd never hear over that.

So I just walked in, from the brisk salt wind off the sea to the warm smells of linseed oil and varnish and glue. Alan was bent over the lathe with his back to the door, intent on the chair-leg or what-

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ever he was turning; so I flicked the bright lights off and on again, our old signal, to save me shouting above the machine or startling him with a hand on his shoulder.

This time he was startled enough anyway, straightening with a jerk, spinning round, chisel glittering in his hand. His eyes widened when he saw me, and he scuttered quick as a rat across the sawdust, round to the other side of the ancient lathe; and okay, now I knew, that was how he felt. It wasn't exactly a surprise.

"What are you doing here, what are you *doing*, sneaking up on me . . ."

I read the words off his lips as much as heard them, and waved an impatient hand at the spinning lathe. "Can you turn that thing off?" I yelled. "I want to talk!"

"What?" He pressed a switch, and the machine's strident whine died to a murmur and then to silence. "What did you say?"

"I said I wanted to talk, that's all."

"What on earth for? There's nothing to talk about. And you've got a solicitor, in any case. That's what you're paying him for, to talk to my solicitor . . ."

"Yes, Alan. That's why I wanted to talk to you. To see if we can't sort something out without having to pay solicitors." He was showing no signs of coming out from behind the security of that big lathe; I sighed, and perched myself on his workbench, between two heavy vices. "We're both rational beings, for God's sake, surely we can settle this ourselves. The courts'll only impose a compromise anyway, we might as well agree on one now and save the money."

"No compromise," he said flatly. "I won't compromise where my sons are concerned. I'm not having you near them, and that's final."

"They're my sons too, Alan."

"Even so. You're no fit mother, you can't be trusted now. And I'll have the judge on my side in this, my solicitor's confident of that. No case law, he says, but the situation's clear-cut. You haven't a hope of getting custody. If you want to avoid the expense of court, then just give up."

"All right, forget custody," I said with a pang, an agony, giving my children away. "But visiting rights at least, you've got to give me visiting rights."

"No. I said, you're not *safe* with them. No contact at all, that's the only way I can be sure. I'm not giving way on this one. The money's another matter, you can have more money if you want it, but you're not to come near the boys."

"Christ." Now he thought I was going to sell my children. "Look," pulling the pack from my pocket and for a wonder a box of matches with it, "do you mind if I smoke?"

"Yes, I do," as I should have known he would. He always had minded with other people, no reason to suppose he'd be more tolerant with me. "Taken up that filthy habit now, have you? Well, not in here, please. It wouldn't be safe, even you can see that, surely. All this sawdust, you could start a fire so easily. We could lose the whole building."

"You don't change, do you?" I said, trying to smile at his paranoia, desperate to find something to smile at.

"No. Why should I?" he asked seriously. "You're the one who's changing. Taking up smoking, how do I know what else? Drugs, maybe. It's another reason to keep the boys out of your hands. Haven't you heard of passive smoking? You could end up killing them as well as yourself, not to mention setting them a terrible example. Two impressionable young lads seeing their mother smoke, they'll try it themselves, of course they will. Do you want to be responsible for that?"

•

And so on, and on. He was right, there was no point our talking, it was just wasting his time and mine. We couldn't manage a moment of contact between us, far less find any common ground. Bizarre, to think we could ever have imagined we'd make a success of marriage; bizarre now even to realise how long we'd lasted.

So okay, let the courts sort it all out. My solicitor had been at least professionally encouraging; they rarely denied a mother access to her children, he'd said. Whatever the circumstances, he'd added. Darkly.

•

So I left Alan in the end, said a snappish, nasty farewell and walked out; and heard the lathe switched on again behind me, heard its motor getting up to speed before I'd even made it out of the door. It was a knack of Alan's, to turn away from unpleasantness and find instant shelter in his work.

I kicked my way round to the front again, fished in my jacket pocket, found the car keys straight away — and realised as I drew them out why I'd done that, how it was that they'd come so easily to hand.

There was nothing much else in the pocket, that was why. Nothing bulky, at any rate.

No cigarettes, in other words. I'd left them on Alan's workbench.

Maybe I ought to give up, I thought; no sense handing him more ammunition for the courts. You could never tell, the judge might turn out to be another fanatical anti-smoker, there were enough of them around.

But it wasn't a decision I had to rush into, it'd be months before we got as far as court. I'd think about it when I finished this pack, maybe. Or the next . . .

•

So I went back. Alan was working over his lathe again, and this time I didn't flick the lights. I'd be just as happy not to speak to him, not to have him even realise that I'd been back. And so would he, most likely. Almost certainly.

So I walked in quickly, walked over to the workbench, collected the cigarettes and the matches; and was just turning to go when he happened to glance up, and saw me.

That time, he really startled. His whole body spasmed with the shock of it, an invader in his workshop, an observer where he'd thought himself alone; and I found out finally why he'd insisted on that code with the lights, why he'd been so neurotic about not being surprised when he was working.

Because his hands jerked, the chisel skittered, slipped off the spinning wood and stabbed down, hard and fast. Ripped through his jeans like paper and plunged deep into his thigh.

Alan blinked at me, his mouth falling ludicrously open and his face paling already, turning filthy white.

Then he looked down at the damage.

Then he collapsed, falling forward across the lathe. There was a sharp snapping sound audible even above the screaming machinery, and I had to duck a piece of flying chair-leg or whatever as I gazed at the slumped figure of my soon-to-be ex-husband, the man who wanted to buy or steal my children from me . . .

•

Alan always fainted at the sight of blood. Come to think of it, that's probably one reason why he married me. Nice to have a nurse in the family, for emergencies.

When he came round, he was lying on the floor of his workshop with his jeans around his ankles, a neat white bandage round his thigh and the smell of antiseptic in the air. He'd always kept a well-stocked medicine cabinet, just in case.

I was at the sink by then with the cold tap running, washing blood off my hands. I glanced round, hearing him groan, and said, "Don't worry, it's not as bad as it looked. You should probably get yourself down to Casualty and get it looked at, in case a doctor thinks it needs stitches; but it's holding together pretty well with sticking-plaster so far." I grinned at him then, still rubbing away at my hands, rubbing and rubbing. "It's useful, having an unconscious patient to work on. You'd have yelled otherwise, when I was cleaning it out."

He just grunted, propping himself cautiously up on one elbow. I gave him some more good advice, shaking the water off my hands and drying them briskly on a tea-towel; then I left him. He could drive himself to hospital, he wasn't badly hurt.

Murdered, maybe, but not badly hurt.

As I drove away, I realised I'd left my cigarettes behind again.

This time, I didn't go back.

•

Giving up smoking was easy, but I knew it would be. Living without the children was much, much harder than living without tobacco; and giving them up for good simply wasn't an option. They might be taken away from me, but I wouldn't give them up.

So I fought, every step of the way; and so I went to court this morning to have my most private business picked over in public.

I stood where they told me to stand, and sat when they said I could sit; I took the oath, and agreed that my name was this and my address was that, and that I was married to the man sitting just over there.

I confirmed that I was a working nurse and the mother of two fine healthy boys aged nine and eleven, currently at boarding-school at the insistence of their father, who apparently wanted custody without responsibility. Then I had to apologise, for slipping that in uninvited.

Then, being invited to do so, I stipulated that – probably as the result of an incident in Casualty when I'd had my lip split by a drunk with bleeding knuckles, that was all, nothing more climactic than that and God, it was so unfair — I'd become infected with human immunodeficiency virus. Better known as HIV, and more widely if more ignorantly known

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as AIDS.

I denied that this made me a danger to my children. Of course I did, that's what I was there for.

But the judge didn't look too impressed with my denials, he didn't look persuaded; so I fell back on the other option, the big one, my last faint chance to get my children back.

I told the judge that if my condition was going to weigh with him, if it was a critical factor, then there was something else he surely had to consider. He surely ought to know, I said, whether my husband was free of the disease himself. He ought to adjourn the hearing, while Alan had a test.

After all, I said, we couldn't be certain when I'd been infected. It might have been years before I was tested, even a careful nurse was always exposed to danger. And all that time I'd been living with Alan, having sexual relations, I said, and having periods every month and so on. Why, only a few months back, I said, he'd cut himself when I was present and I'd bandaged him up, I said. I might so easily have pricked my finger on a safety-pin, I said, and that's all it would need . . .

I said all that, and gazed at him across the court, trying to look anxious and concerned; and I rubbed my hands gently together, as if through anxiety or concern.

His eyes focused on the motion, and for once I knew exactly what he was thinking. The judge was saying that he certainly couldn't order Alan to have an AIDS test, that would be a gross violation of civil liberties, but that he was going to adjourn in any case, and he thought Alan would be very wise to have such a test; but Alan wasn't listening to the judge, or to the murmured counsel of his solicitor.

Alan was listening to the silent message of my hands. Alan was thinking how you held a cut under cold running water to stop it bleeding. He was remembering just how long I'd held my hands under his tap that Sunday afternoon, and how quickly I'd left afterwards.

Alan was realising, was having it dawn upon him that he'd been the victim of an absolutely perfect murder, a murder in miniature, a slow and beautiful bonsai of a murder.

Maybe.

– CD –

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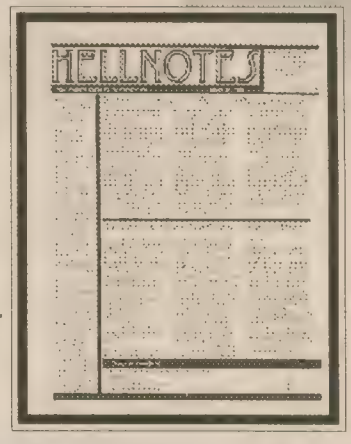

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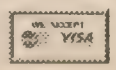


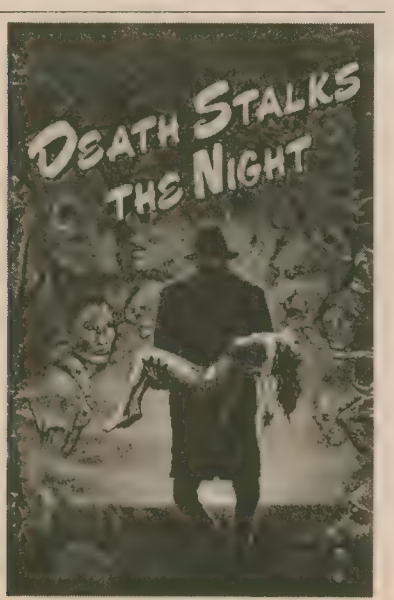
A Conversation with HUGH B. CAVE

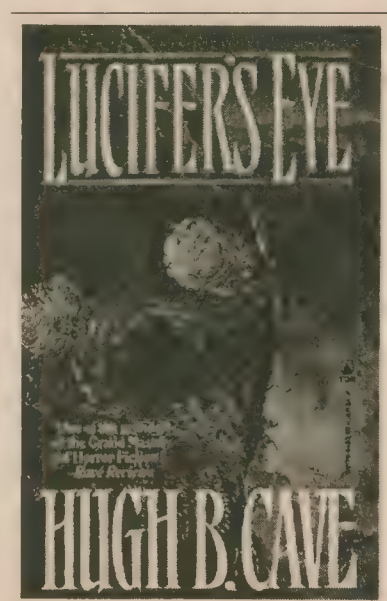
by Darrell Schweitzer

(Recorded at the World Fantasy Convention, London; November 1, 1997)

Cemetery Dance: Did you have any distinct sense that being a "pulp writer" was different from being just "a writer?" Was it really much different than being a writer today?

Hugh B. Cave: I think I can answer that by saying that I, and all the other pulp writers I ever met, learned to write by reading the masters. We read Poe, Ambrose Bierce; we read Stevenson and Kipling and authors of that nature. We wrote an entirely different kind of story than the story that's being written today. Some of the classic fantasy writers of today I find hard to understand, quite frankly, because I'm used to a story that has a beginning, a middle, and an end, and when you get to the end of it you don't have to say to yourself, "What was that all about?"





CD: I wonder if this is so much a matter of it being a different kind of story as much as it is that some of those contemporary examples are actually rather bad.

HBC: Who am I to say who's bad? I can look at a magazine today—I am not naming any names—publishing authors who are well-known today, and I can't understand their stories nearly as clearly as I could understand stories by the old masters. I don't know whether that's better writing today, but I do know this: For years I was a judge in the Scholastic Magazine High School Short Story contests. The prizes were big. They were college scholarships. I was one of three judges who read and evaluated the final twenty stories, out of thousands and thousands that were submitted. And year after year I saw those stories becoming more and more obscure, as teachers who couldn't write worth a damn were teaching their students to write what they thought was arty fiction. When it got to the point where of the twenty final stories you could only understand ten of them, I wrote and gave up the job. I said, "It's hopeless. I can't understand these. How the hell can I judge them?"

CD: Maybe the thing to do is give the prizes to the ones you understand. I as an editor certainly refuse to let myself be snowed under this way. I think that when an author is obscure, it is frequently to hide the fact that he or she has nothing to say. If you can't understand it, maybe there's nothing there.

HBC: I said that once, when *Necrofile* asked me to do a piece for their "Dark Chamber" feature on what did I think of today's fiction. I called it a ride on the GG&O—gimmicks, garbage language, and obscurity. In the course of writing about how I thought those three elements had entered into fiction writing to the detriment of fiction writing, I made the remark that nobody has understood "The Turn of the Screw." There have been dozens of attempts to analyze that story and explain what it is all about. Nobody ever had the guts to say that it wasn't written well enough to be understood.

By the way, as an addendum to that, James himself said that he wrote the story as a potboiler for *Collier's* magazine back in 1890 or somewhere about that. It was not a classic in his mind.

Well, I got a lot of letters from other writers and from a couple of editors and just a lot of readers, saying that they agreed with me on that article. Only one person

wrote and said, "If we could understand 'The Turn of the Screw,' it wouldn't be famous."

CD: In editorial language, the difference is between murkiness and ambiguity. You can tell what is going on, scene by scene. You may not know what it means, but if there's a face at the window, you know there's a face at the window, or whatever. I think that is a very important distinction.

HBC: I agree with you. That's right, Darrell. You can know what's going on, but you have to put your interpretation onto it. But at the end you don't quite know what the author is trying to tell you happened. You have to sort of make up your own ending in your own mind.

CD: I think there's a place for a story which is a great puzzle, like the ambiguities in Hawthorne.

HBC: I agree. All right. I'll back down on that. But there are stories written today that I won't back down on. Here's an example. When *The X-Files* first came on television, most of the plots, almost every episode that I saw, was based on an old pulp-paper plot. They were from science fiction magazines. They were from *Weird Tales*, but they were familiar plots. They were good stories. They had a beginning, a middle, and an end. And *The X-Files* became one of America's top TV programs.

Today, when I see *The X-Files*, I don't understand half the episodes, and I don't think the authors understand half of them, because they are now writing today's type of fiction as a TV show.

CD: I think they turn the logic button off.

HBC: You said it better than I did in fewer words.

CD: One wonders then why so many people look down on pulp fiction. It had considerable virtues, particularly in the areas of clarity and directness. But wasn't it even true that in the '20s and '30s people sneered at pulp fiction? Maybe this is misplaced.

HBC: One mistake that's made about pulp fiction, and I've had it made to me in letters from people, is that people think pulp fiction was written for kids. It wasn't for kids. It was written for grownups at a time when you didn't have *National Geographic* on television. You didn't get to see any faraway part of the world unless you went to the library and looked at atlases and travel books. Pulp fiction took you to the jungles of Borneo and it took you to the North Pole, where you never had a chance to go in those days. You traveled by ship if you traveled anywhere, and it took you forever.

Pulp fiction wasn't written for kids. The kids read *American Boy* and *Boy's Life*. I wrote for those, so I know. I certainly didn't write my stories for kids, and I don't know any kids who read them. My other point is that pulp magazines, like any other magazines, had good writers and bad writers. The best of the pulp writers had no problem moving up into magazines like *The Saturday Evening Post* and *Redbook* and *Collier's* and *Liberty* and *Esquire* and *Good Housekeeping* and *Ladies' Home Journal*. A lot of us did that. I moved out of the pulps and sold three hundred and fifty stories to the slicks, and a lot of other writers sold to the slicks. There were other writers who did not move out of the pulps. So I think I make myself clear that there were good writers and bad writers in the pulps, as there are in any magazines.

CD: Did you find the pulps limiting in what they would allow you to do? Someone like Lovecraft or Clark Ashton Smith would have complained a great deal about the limitations of the pulps. Both seem to have felt that there was a limit on how subtle or atmospheric a story was allowed to be. Did you experience anything like this?

HBC: I'm not sure. As a matter of fact, when I take up one of my pulp stories to be reprinted today in an anthology, I like the privilege of being able to go over it and eliminate certain words, certain phrases. You know what I mean. They're not politically correct today. Or not nice today. Or not considered polite. So I think there was a certain freedom in the pulps, simply because of the time that they were published, that we don't have today.

CD: I'm thinking in the sense of subtleties of psychology. We've all read pulp stories in which the hero has to be utterly heroic without doubts or flaws. I'm thinking of, particularly, the very formulaic material in the Clayton *Astounding*. The stories had one-dimensional characters and so much prescribed action that nothing happens. Did you find that sometimes the editors insisted on stories being fast-moving and superficial?

HBC: I didn't. For one thing, I didn't write science fiction, where most of that happened. I got into fantasy, and I wrote a lot of fantasy, and I wrote a lot of—what do they call it?—*Terror Tales, Horror Stories, Dime Mystery*. There's a name for it.

CD: The weird-menace story.

HBC: I wrote a lot of that, and I wrote adventure stories. But I always tried to get characters that

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interested me. I wrote stories about people. I learned very quickly when I moved into *The Saturday Evening Post*. I had lunch with Ben Hibbs one day and he said, "One thing you have to be sure of, Hugh Cave, is that your hero, in any story we publish, has to be someone we'd allow in our front door to talk to our family. We don't want stories about people that are not nice, that are not decent, that are not acceptable in our homes."

Now the pulps didn't care about that. They just published action stories with a good plot.

CD: Didn't you find, say, *Terror Tales*, far more limiting than, say, *Argosy* or *Adventure*?

HBC: For that type of story, yes, you're dead right. If you saw in that type of story what appeared to be a mad gorilla chasing a pretty young woman down the street, that mad gorilla had to be Uncle Charlie in a monster suit. Whereas in *Weird Tales* and in *Strange Tales* or any magazine of that nature, he could *be* a mad gorilla or he could be something weird, something unearthly. In other words, nothing occult, nothing supernatural could be the answer to a story problem in the weird-menace pulps. Everything had to be logically explained. Sometimes they were hilariously explained at the end.

CD: This may be why people today read a lot more material from *Weird Tales* than from the weird-menace pulps.

HBC: I am sure it is. They were a better type of story. And nobody—well, I won't say nobody, but very few who wrote for the weird-menace pulps are respected today the way Lovecraft is and the big names from *Weird Tales* are, for instance.

CD: Did you have the sense at the time that *Weird Tales* was a special magazine and not just another pulp?

HBC: Yes, I did. I wrote for many other pulps before I had the courage to attempt to sell anything to Farnsworth Wright.

CD: But you did sell to him relatively early.

HBC: I think it was 1934. I'm not exactly sure. My mind isn't that clear at this moment, in this crowd. I sent Farnsworth Wright

a story called "The Brotherhood of Blood." It was a vampire story, one of three that I've ever written of any length. As I remember, he asked me to make one or two very small changes in it, and he bought it, saying he liked it, and the magazine comes out and it's splashed all over the cover. It was my first sale to Farnsworth Wright. He gave me the cover.

CD: So he must have had a great deal of faith in you. What was Farnsworth Wright like to work with as an editor?

HBC: He wrote letters. He asked for changes now and then. Nothing personal ever came out to me in any of his letters. He said, "This is a bit too horrendous for me," or "I like this one very much." Very short letters, and I think that even then he had trouble with Parkinson's disease. He used to type his signature.

CD: Did you ever find him sometimes arbitrary in what he would buy? What I am thinking of is the depiction of Farnsworth Wright that comes out in Lovecraft's letters, as opposed to what everybody else said about him. Lovecraft does not speak well of Wright, in private. But everybody else I've ever encountered or ever read anything by thinks very well of him. But Lovecraft apparently found Wright to be capricious in what he would buy and what he wouldn't. Did you ever find any of that?

HBC: I didn't send that many stories to Farnsworth Wright to know if that's true or not. I don't remember ever getting a nasty letter from him. I know he rejected three or four stories, but then, in the beginning, I sent him only rejects from *Strange Tales*. Everything that I had published in *Weird Tales*, which was paying a cent a word on publication, had been seen by Harry Bates of *Strange Tales*, which paid two cents a word on acceptance. But that doesn't mean that what Farnsworth Wright bought was a poorer story than what Harry Bates bought. It just means that Harry Bates got first look at almost everything in the field at the time, except from Lovecraft. Lovecraft never tried to sell to him, as far as I know.

But Farnsworth Wright got first look at everything Lovecraft wrote, I think. So he was bound to say, "This isn't as good as you could have done yesterday," or whatever.

CD: Lovecraft made a comment somewhere in his letters that he read an issue of *Strange Tales* and found it to be a formula-action magazine with little allowance for atmosphere, and so he didn't think his work very compatible with it. But some recent scholars have suggested that Lovecraft did submit some work to Harry Bates, and may have even written "The Shadow Over Innsmouth" with *Strange Tales* in mind, because it has a long action sequence. But his perception was that *Weird Tales* and *Strange Tales* were very different magazines.

HBC: Somebody, and I can't remember who, who knew Lovecraft, told me once that Lovecraft would send a Farnsworth Wright reject to *Strange Tales*, with the little red dots that Farnsworth Wright would always put on a manuscript when reading it. He did this, apparently with a red pencil in hand. Lovecraft would sent the manuscript right off to Harry Bates, and it said right across the top of it, "This is a Farnsworth Wright reject."

CD: Did you ever know Lovecraft?

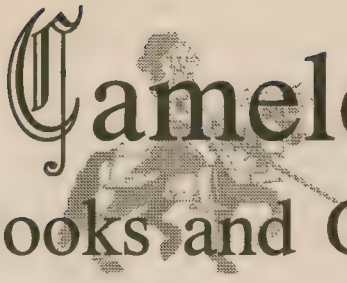
HBC: I never met him, but I wrote to him two or three times, when I was supposed to be the Rhode Island president of the American Fiction Guild, I think it was called. It never came to anything. It was an organization started in New York. They asked me if I would be the Rhode Island president and as such I wrote to H.P. Lovecraft and asked if he would join. He wrote back and said, as I remember, that he wasn't interested. Then we exchanged a couple more letters, that's all. I happened to make the remark that—who was it that said, "Nobody but a fool writes except for money ?"

CD: It was Doctor Johnson.

HBC: Yes, Dr. Johnson. And I quoted that remark in a letter, and Lovecraft wrote about me—what did he call me?—a philistine, or something? In other words, just a money-making hack.

CD: I would imagine that after a while there must have been easier ways to make money, and you wouldn't have stayed with fiction your whole lifetime unless there was more to it.

HBC: You have to remember that in days when I was writing for the pulps in the mid-'30s—at 19 years of age, I was earning five thousand dollars a year as a pulp writer. If college graduates were lucky enough to get a job, they were paid about eighteen or twenty dollars a week. You could buy a brand-new Chevrolet in those days for under six hundred dollars. If you do a little arithmetic, you will realize that today you'd have to earn over a hundred thousand dollars to equal that salary.



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So pulp writers were not starving to death if they did at all well.

CD: I've done the arithmetic and I conclude that even the lowest-paying pulps paid quite well. If you sold a six-thousand-word story at half a cent a word, the rock-bottom rate, that's thirty dollars, which was a working man's salary for a week. It would be the equivalent of at least five hundred today.

HBC: That's right. You're right. Most people don't realize that.

CD: But then you moved beyond pulps. Did you leave the pulps before they sank under you?

HBC: I left the pulps before they folded, before the field left me. Lurton Blassingame was my agent at the time. Everyone called him "Count." He was selling everything I sent him, by offering them to various magazines. Not every story sold the first time out, but he did sell everything I sent him. I told Lurton that I had been trying slick-paper stories. About every fifth story I had been sending out to slick-paper on my own, because I knew he didn't approve of it. He told me this personally. He said, "You should be content to be a 'big name' in the pulps." But I didn't think the pulps were going to last forever, and besides, there was *Collier's* and *The Saturday Evening Post* and all those beautiful slicks that were paying better money and were more highly respected. So I was trying to break into the slicks all this time, and I was getting letters from editors, and I was on the verge of selling to the slicks. It just happened that one day the *Post* bought a story and I moved from the pulps to the slicks.

CD: I would think that the other place to move as the pulps were failing would have been straight into books. There was a booming paperback market.

HBC: I did that about the same time. I had made a trip through the Canadian wilderness with Lurton Blassingame, my agent; Ken White, the editor of *Dime Detective Magazine;* and a friend of mine, Larry Dunn. The four of us spent six weeks in the Canadian wilderness, canoeing just under Hudson's Bay. And Lurton Blassingame persuaded Dodd-Mead to let me write a book for young people about that trip. I did. It was called *Fisherman Four,* and it was my first book.

On the basis of that, I wrote at least a book a year, to the point I've now written thirty-five of them.

CD: By way of various trips—did you ever go to many of the places described in your pulp stories? You wrote a whole series set in Borneo, for instance. Did you ever go there?

HBC: Not when I was writing those stories. I started writing about Borneo because I had picked up a book at the library all about Borneo, written by a missionary. It was fascinating. It was about British North Borneo, and, being English by birth, I thought it would be fun to write a story about a British outpost in the jungles of Borneo. *Short Stories* magazine bought it right away, and they bought a second one. When those were published, I had a letter from Douglas Dold, who was the mastermind at the Clayton magazines. Douglas said he liked those stories of mine. He had personally explored Borneo. Would I like to see his notes on Borneo so I could get my background worked out in a little more detail? So he and I became correspondents. He gave me his notes on Borneo, and I used them as a background for that whole series of Tsiang House stories.

Later, in World War II, as a correspondent, I accompanied the United States Navy and the Australian Army into Borneo, when our people took back Balikpapan. And I got to see some of Borneo at that time. It was wartime, but it was a great adventure just to see what I had been writing about.

CD: Did it seem like what you had been writing about?

HBC: Actually, no. We didn't get into the jungles. We got off the beach around the Paramata Ridge, where I very nearly got killed by a Japanese machine-gunner. I dived under a jeep. He had come up from a spider-hole with a machine-gun. He couldn't quite depress the gun enough to get under the jeep with his bullets. But he made it a trash-heap on top of me, and I was under it for half an hour. So that was a close call, and I didn't want to see much more of Borneo after that.

CD: You've also written a lot of stories about the Caribbean. What was your experience in the Caribbean?

HBC: I had been out to the South Pacific as a war correspondent, and I actually loved it and wanted to go back with my wife and my two boys, especially because my oldest boy, Ken, was supposed to get away from a Rhode Island winter. He had been suffering some sort of infection. I settled on Haiti, because I had just finished reading *The Magic Island* by William Seabrook, and I thought it was a fascinating country. I knew its history. It's had a violent, fascinating history. So, I

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got hold of some people who had been there, and I wrote to them, and I moved to Haiti for the winter.

I was a photographer at the time. Photography was my hobby. I took a lot of pictures as we explored Haiti in a jeep which we took down from the United States. We traveled all over Haiti, got into voodoo—that's a long, long story, but I had a neighbor who was a writer. He had a wife who was a photographer, and it wasn't until I had been there a while that I also found out that he was a voodoo *houngan*. I told him that I wanted to get into voodoo, and he introduced me to the best-known *mambo* in all Haiti, Maman Lorgina, and took me to some services of hers. Then I got to know her, and she invited me to various services. So I was all over the island.

CD: How much were they willing to tell you, as an outsider? You may have read the book *The Serpent and the Rainbow* by Wade Davis. That seems to have revealed some secrets they never told anybody else.

HBC: I read the book. I even saw the picture. Davis was a botanist. He was a plant man. What he said about the use of various poisonous plants and the puffer-fish poison to make zombies, I tend to agree with him. I know about the plants, because I saw that done with a chicken. One time in a little shop; I was in Jacmel, I was talking to a man beside me—I could speak Creole fluently—and we got to talking about zombies. He said, "You don't believe, M'sieur?"

He went out into the yard and he picked up a chicken. He came back to the counter where we were standing and he put the chicken on the counter, reached into his right-hand pocket, took out a handful of leaves, rubbed them together, and held them over the chicken's head. The chicken sort of staggered around a little bit and fell. It was unconscious. Then he looked at me and said, "You see?"

And he said, "Watch." Then he reached into his other pocket and took out some leaves of another kind, rubbed those together, held them over the chicken's head, and after two or three minutes, the chicken began to stir, got up on its feet, shook itself, flapped its wings, and flew out the door into the yard where he got it from. He said, "You see, M'sieur, there are such things as zombies."

So I believe that. As for Davis, and some of the other things he picked up around St. Mark, the secret societies and so on, I spent a lot of time in St. Mark, and they were just Congo societies. All this mysteriousness that he wrote about, I tend to doubt. He didn't speak Creole. He had an interpreter who was the daughter, I think, of a Port Au Prince voodoo *houngan*, one who kept his *hounfor* open for tourists. I think she told him what he wanted to hear, and if that isn't so, I think he put it in the book himself, his own thoughts on what might have happened. They were simply harmless, cooperative Coumbite-Congo societies that he was talking about.

CD: I think there's a problem that anthropologists always have, which is that wherever they go, the locals have them on. An anthropologist will seem to believe anything the natives tell him, and it can be great fun to get this strange foreigner to believe all sorts of preposterous things.

HBC: I think that may be the truth there. As I say, I think he may have been dead right about the use of plant poisons, and so on, because he was a botanist, and he was a professor at Harvard, so he would have known what to expect in the way of plants in Haiti. I saw at one time a book made up by a priest who taught at the College St. Martial, and it was about 280 pages, and each page was a poisonous plant of Haiti, with a watercolor drawing he had done himself, and a description of the plant. He told me that there were more than that in the way of poisonous plants in his country. This was a man I knew well, I traveled around Haiti with. He used to get into my jeep and take off his white robe, and we would just be a couple of guys exploring the country together. I believed the book.

CD: How did the Haitians react when they found out that you wrote supernatural fiction?

HBC: I don't think they knew it. I was there to write a book about Haiti. I didn't tell them what else I had written. You didn't have to. You were talking Creole to them anyway. They never would have read any of those books in English. Most of my experience in Haiti and most of my research in Haiti was done in the mountains, by jeep or afoot or on muleback. I walked across Haiti, from one end of the island to the other. I traveled to these places sometimes several days on muleback with this same Father Henry Smith.

CD: You must have encountered a lot of good ghostly lore while you were there.

HBC: I had a lot of fun and I wrote the book. I had a contract for it by that time. After my first year in Haiti, I went back to the United States with the photographs only, handed them to my agent, Lurton Blassingame, and said, "Can you find me a publisher for a book on Haiti on the strength of these pictures?" I had written four very suc-

cessful war books. They were on the bestseller lists in New York for quite a while. On the strength of those war books, as a correspondent, he got Henry Holt to say, "Yes, go ahead, let him do a book on Haiti." That meant I had to go back there, because I hadn't done all the research I needed to. I spent five winters in Haiti, the best part of five years, actually. Then I wrote that book. It was in print for sixteen years, by the way, that book on Haiti. It was called *Haiti, High Road to Adventure*. Doubleday liked it so much that they asked me to go to Jamaica and do the same thing on Jamaica, and I did. I ended up buying an old, rundown, 550-acre coffee plantation in Jamaica and spending the next fifteen years restoring it.

CD: Have you been back to that area recently?

HBC: I sold the coffee plantation in 1975 and I haven't been back since, because Michael Manley in Jamaica moved in with his Socialism and made a basketcase out of the island.

CD: In recent years you have moved back to writing supernatural stories, the *Weird Tales* sort of thing. Is this a return to a first literary love?

HBC: The first novels that I wrote were about Haiti. They were mainstream novels. *The Cross and the Drum* was a double book-club selection. It was a Literary Guild bonus book and a Doubleday dollar book club book. It went a half a million copies, which in those days, before Stephen King, was very respectable. That was about Haiti. Then I wrote two more mainstream novels about Haiti. Then I got involved in *The Saturday Evening Post* and *Good Housekeeping*, because they were paying wonderful money in those days. When the *Post* finally closed up, when Curtis sold it to that medical company that carried it on, they were paying me over three thousand dollars for a short story. They started me at eight hundred. After forty-three stories, they were paying me close to thirty-five hundred. *Good Housekeeping* was doing the same thing. I was making a very nice living writing for the slicks. But then they folded. The slicks went out as markets for fiction. Like today, these magazines for women, all they're about is how to make your boobs bigger and your butt smaller. They don't use the fiction they did. *Good Housekeeping* used to use five or six stories an issue. *The Saturday Evening Post* every week had five or six stories and a serial. There's nothing like that in the market today. You can't make a living writing short fiction today, at least as far as I know.

So I went back to books, and my first love has always been the *Weird Tales* kind of thing. The first novel was, again, a story about Haiti, *The Legion of the Dead*. It was about zombies. Then I wrote *The Evil*, another book about zombies, and *Shades of Evil*, and an occult story about Florida. I called it *Nebulon's Children*, so they promptly called it *The Nebulon Horror*, because of that book about Long Island with "Horror" in the title—what was that?

CD: *The Amityville Horror*?

HBC: *The Amityville Horror* was a big, big book at that time. So they changed my title from *Nebulon's Children* to *The Nebulon Horror*.

CD: The horror field presently seems to be contracting, if not collapsing. So what do you do now?

HBC: For the past year, I haven't done any writing, because my dear wife Peggy found she had cancer and went under chemotherapy treatment. After a year of my being caretaker, she's just now recovering. I haven't felt like writing for a whole year. So when I do go back to it, I presume I will write some short stories. I have a couple of novels that are screaming to get out. They're not horror novels. Actually, nothing I ever wrote was a horror novel by today's standards. Only two of them were called horror novels. Those are two that Tor published. When I begged them not to call them horror novels in the future, they wouldn't publish me, because horror was hot.

CD: Now you may get your wish, because horror is not hot.

HBC: Now I get my wish. So I don't know what I'll do next, but I have some books I want to write and they're not horror books by today's standards. They'd be more like the mainstream books I wrote on voodoo and zombiism and so on. I don't know yet exactly what I'm going to do. I'm eighty-seven. I don't have to do anything if I don't want to.

CD: You're one of the few writers still active who wrote for the pulps. Do you think you've carried on the good parts of the pulp tradition?

HBC: I've still carried on the sense that a story needs to have a beginning, a middle, and an end, and that when you're through you have said something in that story that is of some value to the reader. I don't want the reader to finish some story of mine and say, "Now why did I waste my time on that and what's it all about?"

CD: Thank you, Hugh B. Cave. —CD—

Hugh B. Cave

Red

HUGH B. CAVE is a living legend. His most recent book is *The Door Below*, a career retrospective, and very highly recommended.

Every good story, they say, should have a moral. This one hasn't. As for a hero, which every good story should also have, perhaps Koni-maka should receive honorable mention, though his heroics were not intentional and therefore cannot be classed as legitimate. Analytically speaking, this is not a story at all, though the wife of Major Grayson tried terribly hard to make it one.

Sitting on the veranda of Tsiang House the night Lord Chauncey came up-river, Major Jack Corony said over his evening gin-sling: "No man could be as idiotic as that. It just isn't possible." But it was possible because it was Lord Chauncey, and because Lord Chauncey's hair was red. And because His Lordship was an intimate friend of Major Grayson's wife.

That in itself should have been warning enough. Major Grayson was at that time the Commanding Officer of the British Foreign Service in Sandakan, and a good one to boot. Unfortunately he was blessed with a most indignant and easily injured better half who pursued religion as warmly as most of the Sandakan neighbors pursued their social engagements. And it was Major Grayson's wife, rather than the major himself, who raised the devil about the chap who came to Tsiang House and lost everything but his underwear. That is all you must remember.

The chap's name was Willoughby. He came to Tsiang House with the magnificent intention of reforming every blessed Dyak in the district and began by journeying up to Jim Kama's kampong, four miles upstream. What he did there, no one really knows to this day; but his reformation apparently included a number of lectures on social customs and personal habits. And personal habits, to your Borneo islander, are very personal indeed. Willoughby should have known better than to trespass on such delicate ground.

The result was typical Jim Kama. Any other Dyak kapala, insulted in the Willoughby manner, might have removed the best part of the offender's vitals and put his head on a stick in the middle of the village; but Jim Kama had encountered Willoughbys before and possessed a divine sense of humor to boot. Consequently, when this one returned to Tsiang House he came alone in a drifting dugout, stripped to his underwear and trussed up like a captured maias, red-faced, sputtering, indignant to the mightiest of extremes. And that was indignant.

He wanted no end of things. He wanted official apologies from Major Corony and from Bruce Deragon and from everyone else in sight. He demanded the corporate arrest of Jim Kama's kampong. He stormed up and down the jungle-walled veranda that night like a hot-tempered Frenchman with a slapped face.

"You must arrest him!" Willoughby ranted. "You must arrest all of them! I demand it!"

"Quite impossible," was the major's drawling reply. "He's the best friend we have. He's the rajah besar—big boss, you know—of the whole district. Arrest him? Good heavens, no!"

So Willoughby went home and raised particular cain. He confronted the C.O. and accused Deragon and Major Corony of having gone native. He had tea with the C.O.'s wife. He confided in her.

The C.O.'s wife, you recall, was the sort of woman who did things. Perhaps she was bored with the routine of Sandakan society. At any rate, she made a habit of leaning across tea tables and listening to confidential outpourings from gentlemen of the Willoughby type. And her favorite words to be explained upon such occasions, with an adequate uplifting of the eyebrows, were "Outrageous! Unthinkable! Why, I shall demand—"

She demanded, and for the sake of local harmony the C.O. granted her demands. With the result that Lord Chauncey came a-calling. And Lord Chauncey, being of the Willoughby breed only more so, came a-

calling with gusto. With such gusto that Major Corony was forced to remark disgustedly, over his gin-sling that evening, that no man could be so idiotic. It simply wasn't possible.

Anything at all was possible with Lord Chauncey. He wore white linen knickers, and a mosquito veil on his solar-topi. He walked with the exaggerated pomp of a cock-robin and talked with the clicking resonance of a stuck phonograph needle. He was small and bird-like. He had red hair. He let it be known, immediately upon his arrival, that he was a high something-or-other in his own right, and a gentleman, and an emissary of justice. He intended to do things.

"It is unthinkable that such an outrage was allowed to go unpunished," he said stiffly to Deragon and the major and the veranda wall.

"Mmm," said Corony.

"I shall brook no interference."

"Mmm," said Corony.

"I intend to go at once to the kampong of this Jim Kama person and make inquiries. If the circumstances justify it, I shall arrest the man."

"Have you ever arrested a Dyak kapala before, Lord Chauncey?" Corony asked.

But it was worse than that, and the major's indifference endured only while Lord Chauncey was there to see it. Later, when Lord Chauncey had slapped fretfully at a few score mosquitoes and had retired irritably to the inner rooms, the major frowned at Bruce Deragon and said moodily, "Can you tell me any reason why that particular sort of fool always arrives when we least want one?"

Deragon could not, and said so. Lord Chauncey was, to be sure, an utter idiot. But he was also a big man in circles where such hard-working devils as officials of government outposts were made and unmade. It would not do to cross him. Lord, no.

And he would go upriver. He would arrest Jim Kama, or try to. He would at least succeed in stuffing Jim Kama full of unpleasantly vindictive ideas.

"We might as well give up our plan without a struggle," said Deragon.

The plan concerned Jim Kama and Jim's Dyaks. It also concerned the other side of the river, where Major Corony had visions of clearing the jungle and building a much-needed addition to the government post. For three months now—or was it four?—the major had been coaxing Jim Kama to come with the men of Jim's village and do the clearing and the building. And Jim Kama, with typical Dyak coquetry, had answered each plea with a smiling promise to "come tomorrow."

Lord Chauncey would effectively squelch all that.

The major rose and strolled inside, to find Lord Chauncey sitting at a table, reading a magazine by lamplight. On the floor, at a respectful distance, sat Koni-maka, the house-boy.

Queer, that. Ordinarily Koni-maka would have been asleep at this hour, and a great amount of shouting would have been necessary to arouse him. The arrival of Lord Chauncey had affected Koni-maka strangely, and he had not properly slept since that distinguished guest had disturbed the tranquillity of Tsiang House. He had affixed himself to Lord Chauncey like a leech, hanging upon that gentleman's slightest command, gazing at him continually with large eyes full of worship. Queer indeed!

It was comical, really, but not to the major. The major looked and grunted and went away. And later, in his own room as he prepared to retire, he tugged off his shirt and said to it nasally, "I hope Jim Kama sends him home in his underwear, dammit, like the other one."

•

Lord Chauncey departed upriver the next morning with all due pomp and ceremony. He went in a dugout prahu with four Dyak police-soldiers recruited from Tsiang House. He sat stiff and puppet-like in the stern of the boat as it nosed around the bend and vanished between frowning jungle shores.

Shortly after noon he returned, fully clad and triumphant. The four Dyak soldiers were still with him. And Jim Kama, the rajah besar of the district, the head man of the terrain, the ruling voice of the entire Dyak neighborhood, the big boss of all the Saputans, Long-Glits, Kayans and Penihings for miles around, sat passively in the waist, smoking an ungainly long-stemmed black pipe and grinning as if he were thoroughly enjoying the indignity of his position!

Despite the fact that he was presumably under arrest for doing atrocious things to friend Willoughby, Jim Kama was delighted. He came up the veranda steps with his face split from ear to ear and yellow teeth gleaming. He scuffed to where the major sat, and bowed with mock politeness.

Major Corony looked at him, bewildered. And Jim Kama said, "I am under arrest, Tuan. The red-thatched one says so."

Jim Kama grinned again, hugely. He turned and grinned at Lord Chauncey, who had walked up behind him. And Lord Chauncey was thoroughly satisfied with himself. His air of superiority was eloquent.

"Congratulations," Major Corony said dryly. "Now what?"

"In the morning I shall return to Sandakan with my prisoner," replied Lord Chauncey.

"Hmm," said Corony.

"There are scenes from this book that will haunt me forever. I know I'll never innocently or absent-mindedly suck on a candy cane again"

—ELIZABETH ENGSTROM

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"Yes, Tuan," Jim Kama echoed. "We are going to Sandakan!" He pulled up a chair, sat, and calmly took a cigarette from the brass box on the table. He propped his feet on the railing. He puffed contentedly. "It is the first time in three years that I have had a vacation," he said with a huge grin.

"Hmm. And do you know what will happen when you get to Sandakan?"

"I shall get drunk, Tuan."

Lord Chauncey frowned. Obviously, the affair somehow lacked the dignity he thought it deserved. "You are under arrest!" he said acidly.

"Of course, Tuan."

Then Koni-maka came, with glasses on a tray.

The major frowned at him. Without a doubt, the house-boy had been feverishly awaiting his idol's return, so that he might gaze upon the man again. Certainly he had never before been known to possess such concern or such consideration for his superiors! Going straight to Lord Chauncey, he stood beside that gentleman's chair and said eagerly, "Tuan want drink, huh? Dem drink nice on hot afternoon."

Lord Chauncey scowled and shook his head. He appreciated the attention, but, sorry, he didn't drink. And Koni-maka, disappointed to extremes, stood and stared sadly at the top of Lord Chauncey's head. Perhaps the red hair fascinated him.

So it went for the rest of that strange afternoon and evening. Jim Kama came and went like a strutting peacock. Or did Jim Kama have something up his sleeve, despite the fact that the sleeve was unspeakably dirty and the rest of his garb harmonized with it?

•

Lord Chauncey sat in the mosquito room—that comfortable little wire-screened enclosure at the far end of the veranda: the only portion of the entire house where a human being could sit in peace after the sun had plopped out of sight, while trillions of buzzing, fluttering, squirming things sought frantically to burst through the screen and engulf the lamp-globes.

That fluttering of nameless insects caught Lord Chauncey's attention. He looked up and about him.

"Wonderful!" he breathed.

"Eh?" said Deragon, who sat there with him.

"I am something of an entomologist."

"Oh." Deragon shrugged. "Bugs."

Lord Chauncey rose to examine the screen. He had never been inland in Borneo before, and there was plenty to examine, to be sure. There were blue-bellies and spider-flies, stick insects with tremendous legs, great owl-moths with mottled red and white wings. There were queer little button-shaped bugs that the Dyaks called tchks-tchks.

The light drew them, and the wire screening held them at bay. So many were they that the entire face of the screen was a wriggling, squirming mass of life.

"Marvelous!" Lord Chauncey gasped.

He inspected. He prowled back and forth, enraptured. He uttered incoherent syllables of admiration. And presently he came to an abrupt stop and stood transfixed, staring.

Then suddenly he poked his fingers against the screen and all at once gushed with glee.

"I've got it!" he shouted. "A *Noctuidae*!"

He took from his pocket a little gold pen-knife on a chain. With it he sawed a hole in the screen. When he turned again, he held the red-winged moth securely in his fingers, and without so much as a word of apology for damaging the screen, he turned and ran with it from the mosquito room.

He left the door open behind him. Through it half a million winged things promptly rushed into that hallowed enclosure, but many others had already entered through the hole in the screen anyway, so it made no difference. Deragon rose, swore fluently, and shook both fists after Lord Chauncey's retreating figure.

That was at nine o'clock. At ten-thirty or thereabouts the drums began.

Native drums in Borneo are like native drums anywhere else. They begin by signifying nothing and end by driving a man semi-insane because he can't stop their infernal throbbing. Long after they have ceased in actuality, he hears them in his own brain, a numbing, throbbing cadence.

These were mild enough when they began. They were merely a murmur carried by the night air. And there was a triumphant, celebrative note to them. But after an hour or more the sound began to fill the cracks in the floor and the thatch on the roof, and the atmosphere in every room trembled with it. And presently Lord Chauncey came from his chamber, where he had been embalming his red-winged moth in chloroform, and said tremulously to Major Corony, "What does it mean?"

Corony studied him. To Corony the drums meant nothing, except that the Dyaks of one of the upriver kampongs—Jim Kama's to judge from the nearness of the sound—had decided to get gloriously drunk on tuak and make an all-night thing of it. But it would not do to tell Lord Chauncey that, of course. His Lordship wanted something more sinister, more glamorous, to tell his civilized admirers about when he returned to Sandakan.

"I don't know," Corony said with a scowl. "I don't like to think."

"You—mean we are in danger?"

"It sounds bad. There are drums and drums. When you've been in the jungle long enough . . ."

Lord Chauncey's eyes could become exceedingly white whenever any suggestion of impending peril caught at his civilized soul. They now became saucers. "Is it because I arrested Jim Kama?" he faltered.

"I'd say offhand that the sound is coming from Jim Kama's kampong," Corony said, twisting his lips. "You must draw your own conclusions."

Lord Chauncey drew them and shivered. He would have clutched at the major's arm, but Corony sharply turned on him.

"Just what happened when you were up there? Did you antagonize the Dyaks?"

"No, no!" Lord Chauncey cried. "I simply asked them to take me to their chief, and I arrested him."

"Hmm."

"There was no trouble, Major Corony! There was no excitement! It was quiet and formal, just as I intended. The man simply asked to be allowed to speak to his subjects. He left me and went among them. Then he returned, and we departed, and—"

"So he talked to them, eh?" Corony mused. "He would, of course. He's Jim Kama. And now, listen."

Lord Chauncey listened and heard the drums. He could not help hearing them. They vibrated through the floor and found a direct route through his legs into his birdlike body, and so into his brain.

"It's awful!" he breathed. "Just awful!"

"If I were you I'd go to bed," Corony said with a shrug. "The damage is done now. You can't undo it. I'll talk to Jim myself."

But he didn't. After watching Lord Chauncey flutter away, he strolled out onto the veranda and into the mosquito room and sat there with his feet propped up and smoked his pipe. Later, when Bruce Deragon joined him and the drums were still hammering their celebrative clamor upriver, he said to Deragon, with a grin, "Little Lord Fauntleroy is frightened. He thinks we're all going to be murdered."

"I heard you," Deragon said. "I was in the reading room. Right now His Lordship is sitting there with all the lamps burning and two toy revolvers laid out on the table in front of him and a face the color of pea soup."

"I suppose," the major sighed, "we'd better join him. He might shoot something. As soon as I've finished this pipe . . ."

That was at midnight, and the drums were still pounding.

•

It was after one o'clock when Lord Chauncey finally stopped his fidgeting and condescended to retire to his own room. He had tried to read, to talk, to smother the throb of the drums by hiking up and down the floor. Exchanging smiles, Deragon and the major had watched him, actually somewhat grateful for the drums and for Jim Kama and for the flow of red pamuti-juice in Jim Kama's upriver kampong.

Then Lord Chauncey went to bed. That is, he started to. Pacing fretfully down the corridor to his room, he opened the door timidly. He had already left lamps burning, so there was no need to ignite them. There was need only to stare.

Lord Chauncey stared, then bolted, screaming. He rushed headlong down the hall and threw himself upon Deragon and the major.

"What the devil?" Corony frowned.

"What's eating you?" demanded Deragon.

"In my room!" Lord Chauncey at last managed to whimper. "It's horrible! Horrible!"

They went to look, and the thing was dead. But it was not horrible. It was, in fact, rather comical. And the fact that it was dead signified nothing, because it had never been anything else.

"Not bad." Corony smiled, poking at it. "Not bad at all."

"W-what is it?" Lord Chauncey begged.

"That's rather a hard question," the major said. "I'd call it a scarecrow, wouldn't you, Bruce?" Lifting the thing out of its chair, he inspected it. "Made out of a couple of bedsheets tied into shape with ropes," he mused. "And these are your clothes it's dressed in, Lord Chauncey, eh?"

They were, Lord Chauncey faltered. Moreover, they were practically useless for further wear. The linen coat was buttoned tightly about the foundation of sheeting, and the trousers were attached with knotted suspenders. And both garments were somewhat similar to a Swiss cheese. Very Swiss. They had been punched through and through with a long-bladed Dyak parang, and the parang itself was imbedded precisely in the center of the dummy's heart.

"Somebody has been playing a joke on you, Lord Chauncey," said Corony. "Offhand, I'd say that—"

Bruce Deragon's foot came down heavily upon the major's instep, silencing him. The major looked sharply into his confederate's face and saw, in Deragon's eyes, a twinkle. And Deragon said slowly, fearfully, "I wouldn't call it a joke. Do you know anything about black magic, Lord Chauncey?"

Lord Chauncey's eyes became saucers again.

"This thing was put here for a purpose," Deragon solemnly declared. "It's supposed to be you, don't you see? Dressed in your clothes, and made of sheets from the very bed you sleep in. Dyak magic, all that. Then its creator took deliberate pains to murder you. See? Knifed you again and again, and finally left the knife in your heart. The savage believes that you yourself will meet the same fate as your effigy. He wants to murder you without bloodying his hands in the process."

Lord Chauncey shuddered. He tried bravely to speak. He gazed pitifully, like a small dog, into the faces of his companions. "Do—do you really think—"

"He's right," the major said. "If I were you, Lord Chauncey, I'd turn in and be sure my door was locked."

"But who—who—"

Then from the doorway Deragon said sharply, "Here now! Look at this!"

His voice was harsh with emotion. Lord Chauncey jumped at the sound of it. The major spun around. And there was something on the door. Something not too distinct, crudely drawn with a heavy black pencil or a chunk of charred wood. To Lord Chauncey it meant nothing. It was merely a scrawly thing with ever so many wavy lines emanating from it.

But Deragon said in a guttural stage-whisper, "A centipede! The Dyaks have any number of ill omens—the tarratjan bird, the hornbill, wooden kapatongs, fallen trees, hundreds of others we know about only vaguely. The centipede—"

Lord Chauncey had had enough. Quite. "I won't sleep in this room!" he wailed.

"But a white man doesn't believe in these things, Lord Chauncey," the major protested. "Still," he added, "I don't exactly blame you. It is a bit nerve-wracking, isn't it? Use my room, why don't you? And turn in now. I'll go with you and look it over. One never knows."

So Lord Chauncey went, and the major paced along beside him. And Deragon, standing in the doorway, gazed at the crudely drawn centipede and the Swiss-cheese effigy, and grinned.

•

"It was Jim Kama, of course," Deragon said later, in the mosquito room where the hole in the screen had been patched.

The major smiled over his pipe. Yes, Jim Kama was undoubtedly responsible. From the very first, Jim Kama had had something up his sleeve. His perpetual grin had indicated that, and his notorious Dyak sense

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of humor had presaged it. Without a doubt, Jim Kama had created the effigy and the badly-drawn centipede.

"You've talked to him, major?"

"I went to his room."

"And he admitted it?"

"He was innocently asleep." The major shrugged. "It would have been criminal to disturb him. If I'm guessing right, he'll not be there by morning, and our good friend from Sandakan will be without a prisoner. And I have my doubts that Lord Chauncey will go back to Jim's kampong to get his man again. The black magic will dull his eagerness."

For half an hour, at peace with the world, Deragon and the major sat alone in the mosquito room with pipe and drink. Then the major tapped out his pipe and stood up.

It was force of habit that directed his steps toward his own room. He had forgotten about Lord Chauncey and Jim Kama and the effigy. He had forgotten, too, that he was scheduled to spend the remainder of the night in the chamber formerly allotted to Lord Chauncey.

He strolled down the unlighted corridor and opened his door. He stepped over the sill. Then he drew a deep breath and stopped in his tracks.

Something small and alive and shadowy was bending there over the bed, over Lord Chauncey's slumbering form.

At the sound of the major's intrusion the something jerked erect, spun about on thin legs, and exhaled sharply. Then it shot past the major and disappeared down the hall.

The major stood there gaping. Lord Chauncey sat up like a jack-in-a-box, screeching, then reared like a rowelled horse and came off the bed with the violence of a slung rock. Rushing across the room, he flung himself upon the major and clutched at Corony's arms.

The major shook him off. A match sputtered. The lamp on the table flared yellow as Corony bent over it. The major then turned and looked all about him—at the bed, at the crumpled sheets, at the open door, and finally at Lord Chauncey.

Lord Chauncey's delicate head of red hair was no longer red. It was no longer hairy! The upper surface of Lord Chauncey's top-piece was a perfectly smooth pate, bald as the palm of a man's hand, utterly white and gleaming!

The major, at that moment, wanted to laugh. He would have laughed had not Lord Chauncey been so thoroughly frightened and trembling. Quite obviously His Lordship was not aware of the loss of his hair. He had not had time to discover it yet. And he had thought he was going to be murdered.

It was not a good time for frivolity.

"Did you recognize him?" Corony demanded.

"W-who?"

"The man who was in here!"

"He tried to kill me! He had his hands on me! If you had not come—"

"You're not safe here," the major said. "If I were you, I'd—"

"I shall leave at once! This is horrible!"

Corony nodded. Certainly that was the wisest course, for Lord Chauncey to leave at once. And to leave quietly. And never to come back. The major said so, emphatically.

"Get dressed," he said. "Hurry!"

Lord Chauncey got dressed. He got dressed with frantic haste. Had he stopped to listen, he would have realized, as the major did, that the drums from Jim Kama's kampong upriver had ceased. In fact, they had ceased quite some time ago. But Lord Chauncey had no time to ascertain any such comparatively unimportant facts. He was scared out of his wits and busy. Terribly busy. When he had finished dressing, he grabbed helplessly at the major's arms.

"Suppose they—suppose they follow us!" he whispered hoarsely.

"Chance you'll have to take," said Corony. "Come."

He led Lord Chauncey to the corridor and realized there were sounds ahead—a multitude of sounds mingled together into a babel of voices. It might have been a heathen ceremonial chant of some sort. In truth it was a drunken chorus, a Dyak rendition of barbershop community singing. But how was Lord Chauncey to know that?

Ten minutes later, Lord Chauncey sat propped against the side of a dugout prahu. "W-where are they?" he gasped.

"Sh."

"B-but—"

"Be quiet!" the major hissed. "We got you out the back way. They won't find you. You're going down river, with some of our native police-soldiers to guard you."

Lord Chauncey gazed fearfully about him. The prahu lay in shallow black water at the river's edge, apparently in a world of its own. Tall, sparse lallang grass rose man-high all around it, blotting out everything but the star-strewn sky above. There were still significant sounds that made Lord Chauncey shudder, but they were muffled now and not so close.

"G-god bless you!" Lord Chauncey whimpered, grasping the major's hand. "I'll never forget this. I'll tell them about you in Sandakan."

The prahu snaked into deep water under the silent impetus of four sturdy paddles. The reeds closed

behind it. Only for a moment more was it visible, gliding through murky darkness; then it was gone. And Lord Chauncey was gone with it.

There was silence then for a moment or two. Then a chuckle. And Deragon, at the major's side, said quietly in a voice full of liquid mirth, "Thousands of them, Major! Thousands of terrible Dyaks rushing to the attack! Can't you just hear him telling it?"

"Actually, how many were there?" the major demanded. "And what did they want?"

"A dozen or so. And they wanted to be arrested."

"Eh?"

"Quite drunk, Major. Jim Kama told them to get thoroughly drunk and come here. I imagine he intended—"

But it was Jim Kama himself who admitted it. Back in the house, when he had been hauled out of bed, he blinked into the major's face and said with a huge grin, "That's right, Tuan. They are all relatives of mine. They will be much disappointed when I tell them they cannot go to Sandakan. We would have had a wonderful time, Tuan."

"Hmm. Quite likely."

"But if you were so dashed anxious to go to Sandakan," Deragon sputtered, "why in the name of heaven did you scare the living daylights out of Lord Chauncey with your centipede and dummy and—"

"He didn't," Corony said.

"Eh?"

"Come and I'll show you. And meanwhile, Jim, if you don't get out of here almighty quick and take your—er—relatives home with you, I'll—"

"Wait, Tuan," said Jim Kama. "You want some men to build new house?"

"What?"

"My relatives plenty drunk now," the kapala said with a grin. "Tuan let them stay here and give them more to drink, tomorrow they begin work."

The major stared, then smiled. He stuck his hand out and Jim Kama, grinning, eagerly clasped it. Then, with Deragon, the major strolled into the corridor.

"You want to remember, Bruce," Corony mused, "that an Iban, first of all, is primitive. You've got to be broad-minded about this and look at the thing from its roots. The Ibans of Sarawak, where Koni-maka came from not so blessed long ago, are probably the wildest devils in all Borneo. Superstitious beyond belief. Still headhunters, in spite of all attempts to curb them. And Koni-maka hasn't been civilized too long, either."

Corony turned to the lower corridor, which led to the native quarters in the rear.

"Of course, under ordinary circumstances this thing wouldn't have happened. We want to consider that before we judge the little imp. And remember, he didn't let his passion get away from him until everything else had failed. He did his damnedest to put friend Chauncey out of the way painlessly. Probably he was disappointed as the very devil when his black magic failed to have the expected effect."

"You mean he actually believed—"

"Not a doubt of it, old man." The major stopped before a closed door and hesitated before putting his hand out. "Not a doubt of it. An Iban, remember, is born and brought up with that sort of thing."

"But why on earth should he have wanted to kill—"

"A born head-hunter." The major smiled. "And the rare species fascinated him. Can't exactly blame the chap, you know. If you or I were to run across a red diamond or a—well, Lord Chauncey made a big fuss over his red-winged moth, didn't he? Rare, you see. Something unusual. Chloroformed it, didn't he? Wanted it with a passion. Same way with Koni-maka. He comes from a long line of head-collectors but never saw a redhead before in his life. Simply couldn't resist." The major's hand closed firmly over the doorknob. "Careful now. He may be expecting us."

He pushed the door open and stepped abruptly over the threshold. Then with eyes wide he stood quite still and said simply, "I'm damned."

It was quite something to be damned about. At the table sat Koni-maka. On the table, within reach of his limp hand, stood a smallish bottle with a red and white label marked CHLOROFORM. And the house-boy was very much unaware of their intrusion. Unconscious, he slumped in his chair with his head lolling and his feet sprawled out before him.

The entire upper portion of his Iban head was embellished and decorated and bespangled with Lord Chauncey's red wig!

"Is he dead?" Deragon murmured.

"Dead?" The major leaned over, sniffing. "Not a bit of it. He's—do you know what I think? I think the little imp went to Chauncey's room first, to steal this." He touched the red wig reverently. "Chauncey, of course, wasn't there; he was asleep in my room. But this bottle of chloroform was there on His Lordship's table, and anything in a bottle—well, you know Koni-maka. He took it along."

"And when he got back here after locating Chauncey and the wig," Bruce said, "he—"

"Took a nice deep whiff of it to see what particular kind of white man's whiskey it was."

And that's all. Analytically speaking, there's nothing to it, is there? No hero, no unity, no underlying motif. But that's how things happen in Borneo.

And it was Socrates, wasn't it—or Plato or Aristotle or one of those chaps—who first eulogized the little things in life? —CD—

A Conversation with

ED BRYANT

by Trey R. Barker

At one point, Ed Bryant was merely one of speculative fiction's most respected authors. But now, after a distinguished career of more than thirty years, after numerous books and collections, screenplays and Nebula awards, it is probably safe to call Mr. Bryant one of the field's statesmen.

Recently, Mr. Bryant sat down to discuss his newest collection, *Flirting with Death.*

Cemetery Dance: One of the new stories, "Curtains," had quite the gestation period. Why is that?

Ed Bryant: "Curtains" probably took about two and a half years to write. It took a long time to write because it was a very personal story. It took a long time for the characters to articulate to me what they wanted to do and where they wanted to go. I knew what was going to happen, I didn't know how the characters were going to get there.

CD: Did the many movie references require research?

EB: Very little of it had to be researched. I'm a movie fan. So most of the references, well just about all the references in there, are right out of my movie watching and my interests.

CD: You used to write primarily science fiction, but now you explore mostly horror/dark fantasy. Why?

EB: Well, what I tell people sometimes is that my switch over to horror occurred during a 45-second elevator ride with the agent Kirby McCauley. All the time that I was writing science fiction, I was incorporating elements . . . that were pretty dark. But in the early—must have been around 1980 or so—I was getting dissatisfied with writing predominately science fiction. I had heard that McCauley was going to be editing this landmark original anthology called *Dark Forces,* which was going to be the quote unquote *Dangerous Visions* of horror fiction, and I thought, "Cool." And I'd also knew that the anthology was by invitation only and certainly I was not anyone with a track record in horror so I was not one of the people issued an invitation to submit.

So what happened was, at a World Con I think, there was a long, long elevator ride down to the lobby and I found myself alone with Kirby McCauley. I used the opportunity to ask Kirby if I could have permission to submit a story to him. And this wasn't entirely an act of brazen courage on my part. Before Kirby was an agent, when he was working as, among other things, a book reviewer for the Minneapolis newspaper, he had reviewed my first book, *Among the Dead,* which was a collection with a great deal of dark fiction in it. Also, it's my belief that Kirby was the primary reason that his then-client Stephen King used *Among the Dead* as one of the 100 core collection horror titles in King's book about horror, *Danse Macabre.* So I had that going for me when I braced Kirby for an invitation to the anthology.

CD: You sure it was Kirby McCauley or was it that fifty you sent Steve?

EB: (laughs) At that point, Steve didn't need a fifty. By the time the elevator doors opened, and it may be because of my reasoned tone and it may be because Kirby was getting nervous about being trapped with a madman in an elevator in a high-rise, he said, "Sure, send me a story."

So I wrote "Dark Angel" and

Photo credit: Dan Simmons

sent it to him and he published it and I was a happy camper.

CD: Three of the new pieces in *Flirting with Death*, "Nick and Noira," "Curtains," and "The Clock That Counts the Dead," are crime fiction. Is that where you find yourself going as a writer?

EB: Well, crime fiction may be a little bit limiting in terms of label, for this reason: "Nick and Noira" is a crime story. And yet it takes place in a world that I think is not exactly realistic. It's the world of the 1990's but it's a world which is heavily influenced by the elements that I define as 'noir' fiction. If one wanted to be completely objective about it, this is probably an alternate world in which these people are living.

"Curtains" is a realistic story, yes, but it's also a world in which the characters are, to a large degree, defining their own personalities and viewing their own lives in terms of fantasy, in terms of movies, especially horror movies. So that skews the reality that I'm painting.

"The Clock That Counts the Dead" can be looked at two ways. It's either a realistic crime story in which the narrator is a complete and utter loono who is misinterpreting and is utterly screwed up inside his own skull. Or he is a reliable narrator and a lot of very fantastic processes are going on in the world, like, for example, the end of humanity as we know it. I know that my character is nuts, but I also know that everything he's experiencing is utterly and completely real. So to me, it's clearly a story of the fantastic. But to other people it may well be interpretable as just a story of a nutball guy who has a hard-on to kill everybody on earth.

CD: But isn't that the conceit of all the nutballs?

EB: (laughs) Well, of course! Regardless of whether you're an accountant, doctor, serial murderer, or global genocide advocate, you get nowhere without ambition. And to the ambition, you have to add talent, imagination, initiative, hard work.

CD: So being a writer is much like being a global genocide advocate?

EB: Well, in the sense that to be a writer is to be the complete solipsist, because the universe is yours. All of us who write have complete freedom to set up the ground rules any way we want to. We're only constrained by the interaction between us and our stories, and the outside world: the readers, the audience, the editors, the publishers, the consumers, and the obsessives who take issue with your fiction and threaten to come and kill you.

I suppose it was partly because of reader reaction that I came up with my favorite interview question, which I last used when I was interviewing Clive Barker at the World Horror Convention in Eugene, Oregon, which was: "So, Clive, what is the animal you would least like to find dead on your porch in the morning when you go out to pick up your paper?"

Clive, to his credit, gave me a wonderfully serious answer. He said, "Actually, I'd hate to see a dead bear cub." The implication being that a dead bear cub on his porch means that Mama Bear is probably mightily pissed off and is somewhere in the bushes.

That's a great writer's answer to a . . . fairly stupid writer's question.

CD: Is there ever going to be an Angie Black collection?

EB: I think so. Angie in some ways is a female counterpart for me in that I've noticed as I've written over the years she's gained about a year in age with every twelve months that I've lived. So she continues to be a more or less gracefully aging middle-aged creature. Except in her case, she's a witch. She has extraordinary powers. She can sometimes control them, sometimes not.

But, basically, she's someone who knows full well that even having a knowledge and working skill with magic is no panacea for whatever your life problems are. She's always getting in trouble, she's always screwing up.

Angie starred in a short novel called *Fetish* several years ago. My agent tried, after *Fetish* came out, to interest a trade publisher in a full-length version, but the first major New York publisher he sent it to elicited a really snotty letter from one of the editors there.

The problem was not so much that the letter was a turn-down, but the letter said that she thought this was one of the most amateurish attempts at suspenseful horror storytelling that she'd ever seen and she really felt that the author in question should probably be suppressed, if not buried alive in a swamp. So this kind of put a chill on the project.

CD: Speaking of bad rejections, what's your worst?

EB: There have been reader rejections, which I've loved, that were much stronger than any professional rejections I've ever gotten. One of my early stories was published in Damon Knight's anthology series called *Orbit*, and I consider it to be the best of my stories from the first 15 years of my writing. It's called "Shark," and it's a science fiction love story about an ill-fated romance in a future war. I played quite a lot with narrative structure, lots of flashbacks, flash

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forwards; I made complete hash of the conventional storytelling structure.

Damon Knight passed on to me a letter he had gotten from one of *Orbit's* readers. It was six . . . no, seven single-spaced typewritten pages in which the reader told me what a complete botch I had done with the structure of the story. But the reader felt the story warranted enough interest that she was willing to show me how to re-edit the story and did so at painstaking length; obsessive, compulsive length.

And after the initial shock of looking at the sheaf of papers which told me how to write my story correctly, I realized that in its peculiar way, this was an extraordinary compliment. Somebody had been so struck by that story that she had taken that amount of time and energy to show me how it ought to be done.

Of course, maybe I'm just rationalizing it. Maybe I'm so eager for a compliment, I'll give anything a positive spin.

The other example would be when my collection *Among the Dead* came out. I got a letter from a guy on the east coast [and] this man said he'd read my story and found it one of the most disgusting examples of negativist thinking and writing it was his displeasure ever to have encountered. I mean, this was a killer letter. He just used verbo-gastro-intestinal surgery to give my body new outlets. I was taken aback. I sent off a brief note, which I believe was just stunned and apologetic, saying "Jeez, I'm sorry you didn't like this book. Gosh, I don't know what to say."

A few months went by and I got another letter from this gentleman. And in the letter, he said what happened was this: he was a science fiction reader. Friends of his had given him my book to read while he was in the hospital recovering from severe cancer surgery. And the tone of my book had apparently been exactly the wrong thing for him at that point in the recuperative process.

But he said he had taken the time to think about what he had read in my story collection. He also revealed that he was a professor at a Connecticut university. Basically the capper was that not only did he apologize for the tone of his initial letter, but he said that he was currently teaching a course dealing with the issues of death and dying and had now recommended *Among the Dead* as part of the required reading for this death and dying course.

CD: An '80's story of yours,

"While She Was Out," has become quite the successful story.

EB: I never would have guessed, but it has turned into one of the most popular of my recent stories. Popular in that it's been reprinted at least a dozen times. It's not only been perennially optioned for feature film production by the gentleman who wrote the script for *Excalibur* and *The Emerald Forest*, but it also was sold to television and was produced as an episode of the *Hidden Room* series on Lifetime cable with Stephanie Zimbalist playing my heroine. So, yeah, this is a story which has had quite a successful life and I've been delighted to see it.

CD: In *Love Kills*, Ed Gorman called it one of the best crime stories of the '80's.

EB: Yeah, Ed Gorman. As far as I'm concerned, I just have to say, bless Ed Gorman and may his kind increase. I like Ed very much as a writer, but as an editor, he seems to have adopted "While She Was Out" and has single-handedly given me a presence in the mystery and suspense field just by endlessly reprinting the story in various anthologies. What can I say? I'm pleased and so is Delia, the heroine of the story.

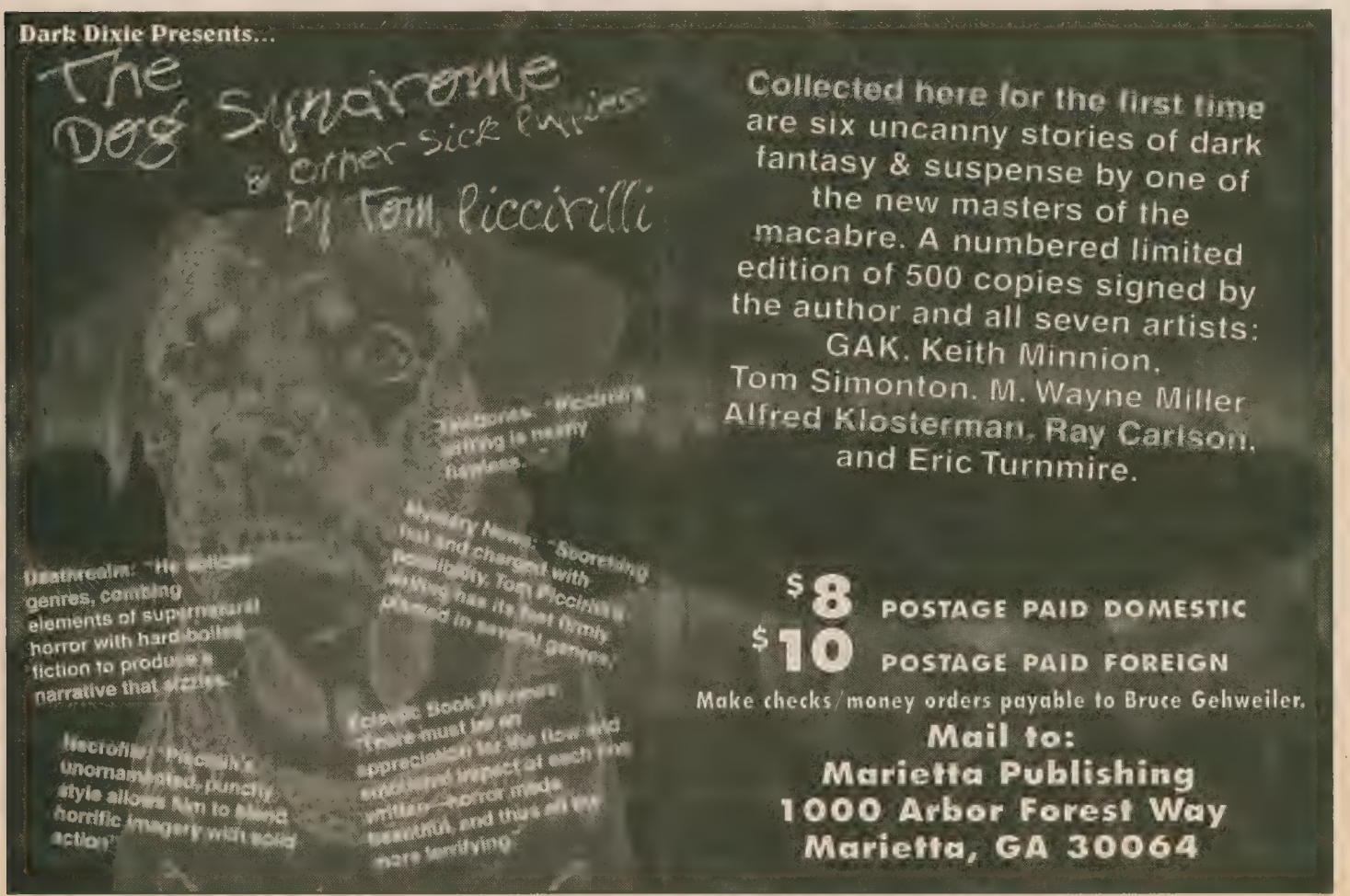
CD: Gorman is reprinting "Doing Colfax," isn't he?

EB: Yes. It's in the new collection. Also, [Gorman is reprinting] "Predators," that's in the new collection, which is a supernatural story. But it's still a very gritty, dark suspense story of life in the city today. Although it has a much happier ending than "Doing Colfax" does.

CD: Where did "Doing Colfax" come from?

EB: I have to thank a woman named Juliet Whitman, who was reviewing for the Boulder (Colorado) *Daily-Camera*. Juliet used to invite me to come along to some of the plays that she was seeing. There was a production at the Denver Center for the Performing Arts of a play called *Roads*, which was about Henry Lee Lucas and Otis Toole, those two colorful Texas boys reputed to have killed zillions of women. But as far as I can recall, the only one they ever actually nailed them on was, one of them had actually killed his mother.

When we were in the lobby after the play, Juliet and I were talking about the story and I said, "You know, I think all those issues in the play tonight could have been told much more economically. Basically



what this play is about is the banality of evil, the banality of violence." And I said, "I'll bet—" Writers always have to be careful when they start a sentence that way. I said, "I'll bet I can give you this entire story quickly, no muss, no fuss, in just a few words."

Juliet said, "You're on."

So I wrote "Doing Colfax," which is all of, I think, 1500 words but says what I want to say about the banality of evil and mindless violence.

CD: Where do you see your writing going in the next fifteen or twenty years?

EB: When I've interviewed writers on my now defunct *Omni* Online Internet show, that's been one of my favorite questions because I'm always curious how working writers perceive their own future. And for myself, my first hope is that I'll still be around in twenty years to be writing and to be writing actively and writing things that interest me.

Maybe that's getting into the real ambition I have.

I'd like to live not just another twenty or thirty or forty years, but I'd like to live those years vitally and not looking up from a sickbed and not able to reach the remote and forced to watch afternoon talk shows forever.

Okay, first of all, I want to continue evolving. As I would expect my own life to develop variant interests with what I'm intrigued with now, I expect that my writing will reflect that. Although I would hope that the constant would be that I would continue to explore human interrelationships, which is really what I think is at the heart of anybody's fiction if it's at all good or at all ambitious.

In terms of subject matter, who knows? Whether I'll continue with horror or whether I'll suddenly decide one day that ancient western historical fiction is going to be my overriding passion for twenty-five years, who knows.

CD: Tomorrow I'm coming over to your house for dinner. What is the most interesting bit of paraphernalia I'll see?

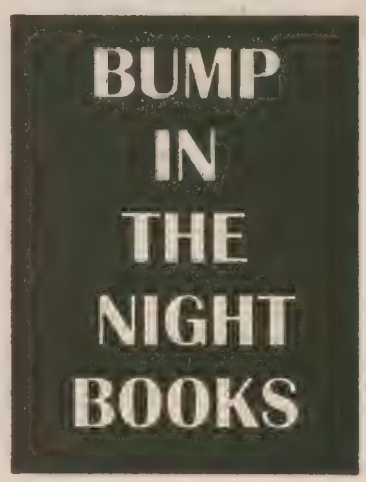
EB: My house is full of all sorts of trash. Thanks to the writer George Guthridge, who was fencing local art work for the Innuit village in which he was teaching on Gamble Island off the coast of Alaska, I've got an *uzig*, which is a wonderful piece of Eskimo artwork. It's basically a carved and decorated walrus penile bone, which is not something that everybody has on their mantel.

One thing you've got to say about a walrus penile bone is you can use it for house self-defense. It's about 18 inches long, it's got a real heft to it, and you can slug the hell out of an intruder. And the police would never be able to figure out what weapon was used, since I doubt there's any big FBI data storage file on the impact characteristics on a walrus penile bone.

But just so people don't think I've got a completely outré sense of decor, on the other side of the breakfast nook I've got a nice, old America-style wooden shelf that has a large part of my collection of traditional salt and pepper shakers. While I do have an affection for the salt and pepper shaker that includes the Empire State Building and King Kong with Fay Wray in one upraised fist and King Kong as the pepper shaker and the Empire State Building in white as the salt shaker—and it may or may not be an implicit racist statement, I'm not sure—I do have some of the really tasteless sorts of salt and pepper shakers. Like a set of one pig mounting another pig, which I can't quite bring myself to bring out for supper.

But I think my all-time favorite set is a bellboy and a suitcase. And the suitcase is an alligator suitcase in perfectly textured alligator skin and that's one shaker. And the other shaker is an alligator standing upright wearing a bellboy's costume. This is probably my favorite piece of kitchen decor. That and my Space Shuttle Challenger Commemorative plate that was issued after the Challenger disaster. Even I find it in dubious taste, but I felt it was a must-have for my kitchen.

– CD –



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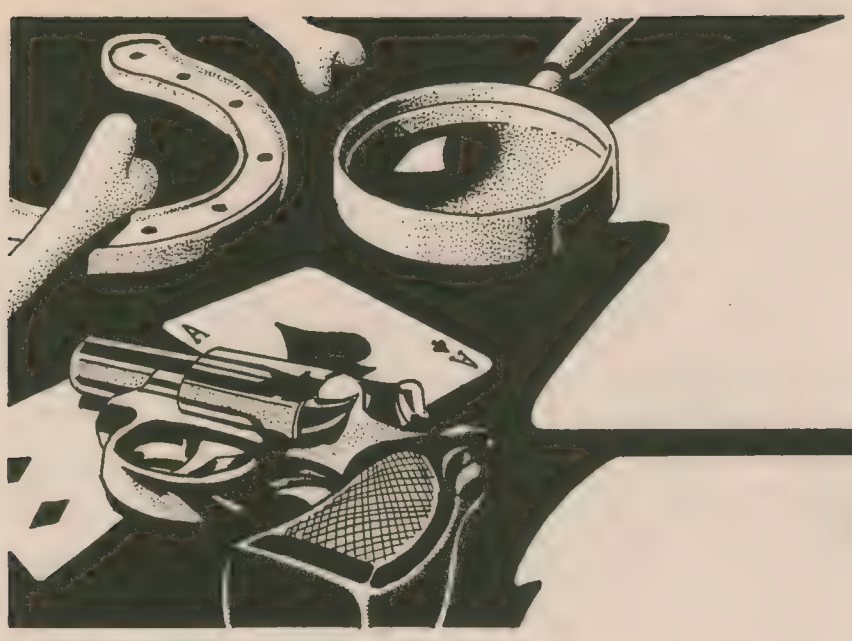

ED GORMAN

GORMANIA

A few months ago, a mystery book dealer I know came across some articles by me in some science fiction fanzines from the late 1950s and early 1960s. He was nice enough to send the fanzines along. I enjoyed all the material but my own. Boy, was I a dope back then.

Most of the zines were relatively predictable, zealous young science fiction fans arguing the merits of the latest issues of *Galaxy, Astounding, Amazing* and *Fantastic*. You could sense in these zines the coming New Wave. Earlier in the fifties, it had been enough to say that a given story (say, a Sturgeon) worked or didn't work. Now, one had to find a more self-consciously literary explanation for why it succeeded or failed. There was a lot of good sf material back then. Algis Budrys, Chad Oliver, Judith Merrill, Fritz Leiber and people of that caliber were at or near their peak, with young writers such as Harlan Ellison, Robert Silverberg and Carol Emshwiller coming on strong. (I remember the first time I read her "A Day At The Beach." I don't think I'd ever been literally stunned by reading a story before. It was, no joke, virtually a religious experience for me.)

Looking through the old fanzines reminded me that you could all feel the sixties coming. I mean the dope-smoking, anti-war, peace-and-love sixties. While most fanzines still contented themselves with articles about science fiction and fandom, several zines were explicitly political: *Warhoon, Habbakuk, Kipple* — these magazines came along a bit further into the sixties. In many respects, they were the most exciting of all the zines because they pitted the science fiction right against the science fiction left. (At the end of the decade, Richard E. Geis would do much the same with his various fanzines.) When you were an eighteen-year-old supermarket bagboy in a small Iowa town trying to save money for college, the political zines were pretty heady and glamorous stuff with their discussion of drugs, free love, underground political groups, communism, fascism and free speech. As far back as 1961, there were angry mentions of some weird place called Viet Nam. As I said, you didn't hear much about these subjects hanging out at the DX station and speculating on how the Iowa Hawkeyes would do in football this coming fall.

I enjoyed my five or six fannish years. I published a few zines myself, I went to a few conventions, and I learned a great deal about the wide world outside small-town Iowa. I never felt quite adequate in any sense — I always wanted to write as well as Ted White, publish a zine as spellbinding as Dick Lupoff's *Xero*, and know as much about serious literature as Roger Ebert — but there were enough outcasts in fandom to make me feel at least reasonably comfortable.

For pure pleasure, nothing beat Buck and Juanita Coulson's fanzine *Yandro*. The Coulsons are interesting writers. Buck is an especially savvy book reviewer. I rarely agreed with him but man was he fun

to read. *Yandro* was always just the right balance of sour and sweet. The arguments never got personal, and the fannishness never got cloying. The Coulsons — who went on to write some fine sf novels of their own — really knew what they were doing.

The Jesuits say give us a boy till he's fifteen and we'll claim him forever. I think the same is true for most people who were in sf fandom. Bob Bloch, God love him, always used to say that mimeograph ink had a way of getting into your blood and, for me at least, that's been true. I was a lonely, confused, and profoundly curious adolescant lugging a lot of childhood baggage along with me. I met like kind in fandom and for a few years enjoyed myself. There were some bad moments, most notably the suicide of sixteen-year-old Kent Moomaw, who'd always reminded me of one of those sad young geniuses in C.M. Kornbluth's fiction. And the fan, and pretty good friend of mine, who went on to become a rather important member of the American Nazi party. While I've forgotten a lot about my fan days after all these years, I still remember a few incidents that will stay with me all my life. I knew some good people, and had some good times, and probably even learned a thing or two about writing. As Bob Bloch said, the mimeo ink gets in your blood.

These days, after selling a few sf novels that weren't quite at the Nebula-winning level, I make my living writing suspense fiction. All the time I was reading Ray Bradbury and Gordy Dickson and Wilson Tucker, I was also reading Raymond Chandler and Chester Himes and John D. MacDonald. I liked sf and crime fiction equally.

I don't have much sense of fandom today. I'm not even sure if there is a fandom as such today. But I hope there is. And I hope it continues to thrive. Because if there is such a thing as reincarnation, I plan to buy myself another mimeo the next time around.

— CD —

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SPOTLIGHT ON PUBLISHING

Various distractions and a rapidly-approaching deadline conspired to prevent my planned interview with Barry Hoffman of Gauntlet Publications from happening in time for this issue of *CD*. The interview — covering Gauntlet's "Classics Revisited" line, their original titles, and Hoffman's own writing — will appear next issue. In the meantime, we've got reviews of a real variety of small press publications, including Gauntlet's reprinting of Ray Bradbury's *The October Country*, that'll hopefully keep you sated until then.

•

Midnight Never Comes, edited by Christopher and Barbara Roden; 1997; 230 pg. hardcover; $38.50 + $5.70 shipping.

Binscombe Tales, by John Whitbourn; 1998; 246 pg. hardcover; $40 + $5.70 shipping.

Ash-Tree Press; P.O. Box 1360; Ashcroft, British Columbia; Canada V0K 1AO. email: ashtree@ash-tree.bc.ca; web site: http://www.ash-tree.bc.ca/ashtreecurrent.html

Ash-Tree Press, a previous subject of *CD*'s "Spotlight on Publishing," has firmly established itself as the prime purveyor of vintage supernatural reprints from the late 19th and early 20th centuries. However, as ATP's Christopher and Barbara Roden noted in the interview, there's only so much old supernatural fiction that's worth tracking down and reprinting. With that reality in mind, ATP has begun incorporating more fiction by contemporary authors into their line-up — although these new tales are often pastiches of ATP's typical fare, replete with characters, settings, and sensibilities from an earlier era. Many such inspired tales can be found in *Midnight Never Comes*, a collection of seventeen " . . . new stories, written in the traditions of the best supernatural tale."

Among the stories that carry the strongest echoes of their literary forebears is Michael Chislett's "St. Asphodel and St. Jonquil," which is much in the way of Clark Ashton Smith, but with a dash of M.R. James and a splash of the erotic stirred in. Chislett's tale concerns a novice art collector whose obsessive quest for the other 2/3 of a triptych leads him into the den of two fetching, if ultimately inimical, spirits. Steve Duffy, whose Ash-Tree collection *The Night Comes On* will be reviewed in my next column, evokes strong memories of James with his story "The Marsh Warden," which centers on an inn haunted by odiferous emanations, and worse, from a recently uncovered well. A haunted inn and a recently revealed facet — in this case, it's a newly-restored private party room — are also at the heart of Terry Lamsley's "The Snug," wherein a group of pensioners, unwittingly visiting the inn on the anniversary of earlier atrocities, meet with horrid fates. A few brief narrative lapses prevent "The Snug" from ranking with the very best of Lamsley's often-superlative work.

An archeological dig provides an engaging atmospheric setting for Ron Weighell's "The Mouth of the Medusa," while in "Bury My Heart at Southerham (East Sussex)," John Whitbourn leverages the secluded environs of a day-tripping hiker, whose rambles land him in the midst of a battle between opposing mythic factions . . . and perhaps a larger war between time-honored tradition and the unrelenting, unfeeling march of progress.

Gruesome terrors from the past rear their heads in both Colin Mackay's highly effective "Mary King's Close," involving an alley where the final victims of the Black Death were quarantined and left to die in 1645, and Steve Burt's "The Mason's Leech," in which the demolition of an old factory leads to the grisly discovery of a dog that was purposely infected with cholera and sealed up alive inside the factory walls during its construction. Burt's tale takes a chilling, unsettling turn, but it's somewhat hampered by its brevity.

Two of the bigger names here, Jonathan Aycliffe and Simon Clark, deliver strong stories, although Aycliffe's effort is sufficiently reserved as to lack great impact. The best stories here, though, are by two of the least-recognizable names. Jesse F. Knight's "To Capture a Perfect Wave" is, at its most basic level, a simple, unadorned ghost story. But this quietly sentimental tale is powered by emotions that run just beneath the surface, as a woman who found little fulfillment in life discovers contentment in death through the kind ministrations of her grave's caretaker. Marni Griffin's "Outside the Gates," perhaps the least explicitly supernatural entry here, is remarkably affecting, chronicling the taciturn existence of a lonely woman who's greatly moved by the writings of one Miranda Stalker, and attempts to initiate a correspondence with the author. Griffin's narrative voice is measured and mature, making "Outside the Gates" a substantial highlight in what is overall a very strong anthology.

•

The John Whitbourn story in *Midnight Never Comes* is actually something of a departure for the author, in that it's lacking both his customary irreverent tone and his normal milieu of Binscombe, with its attendant cast of characters. As one might suspect from the title, *Binscome Tales* is nothing but Binscombe bits — incorporating 15 linked, with six being previously unpublished.

Much of the popularity of these tales, I would venture to guess, stems from the interplay, often consisting of a dry, witty repartee, between the two primary characters, Mr. Oakley and Mr. Disvan. Oakley is a new kid in town, relatively speaking, having moved to Binscombe not long ago; his frequent bemusement and naïve queries are only tolerated by long-time residents because of his ancestral ties to the village. Disvan is one of those long-time residents, and is intimately familiar with all of the place's sundry quirks, customs, and entities — even if he is somewhat less than forthcoming with that knowledge, as Oakley rather plaintively notes:

> I fully recognized this to be a fine example of what I called Mr. Disvan's "hook lines," whereby each answer he provided carried not merely the seed but the ripe, ready to drop fruit of another question.

I usually find the pairing of humor and the supernatural to make for uneasy bedfellows, but Whitbourn largely manages to pull off the trick, due in no small measure to the restraint he shows in laying on the humor, as well as the deadpan style utilized. Oakley and Disvan are a well-matched duo, and the bizarre happenings in Binscombe make for an entertaining backdrop, as the former skeptic Oakley alludes to:

> Once upon a time, I would have doubted – made discreet remarks about mental stability and sought rational explanations. Now, after years of Binscombe residence, I found within myself the ability to accept the unlikely as quite probable . . .

O&D's incredible adventures bring them into contact with a variety of supernatural phenomena, which is often seen to be behind the scenes of the "normal" Binscombe, or even existing in an "alternate" Binscombe:

> . . . I sought, as before, to reconcile the strangeness of what I was hearing with the plain-as-it-should-be-ness all about. . . These two streams of Binscombe life seemed to be separate and yet in close parallel. They were interconnected in ways that I could not fathom; there were bridges across the great void between them, but I was not privy to their whereabouts. However, many native Binscomites seemed to take these bridges' existence for granted and were able to cross them at will.

The strangeness includes the resident whose dreams gradually transport him to a bleak, desolate, alternate version of Binscombe in "Another Place;" the bus passenger in "Waiting for a Bus" who's hijacked for a 40 year joyless ride by a demonic driver; the aging angler of "Till Death Does Us Part," who — when finally granted some peace by the death of his shrew of a wife — mistakenly thinks he's free to fish without harassment; the haunted archeological site of "All Roads Lead to Rome;" the amalgamated doll-human creature of "Hello Dolly;" and the inspired weirdness of an electrically-charged poltergeist in "A Video Nasty, or, The Sins of the Fathers."

As I'm wont to say, this collection isn't for everyone. But if you're a reader who appreciates a few guffaws to go with your ghosts, you should find yourself basking in *Binscombe Tales*.

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Macabre Delights & Twisted Tales by John B. Ford; 1997; 80 pg. chapbook; $6.50. BJM Press; c/o 95 Compass Crescent; Old Whittington; Chesterfield S41 9LX; United Kingdom.

Macabre Delights & Twisted Tales is the inaugural publication of BJM Press, and author John B. Ford is apparently the thinly-veiled pseudonym of BJM principal John Basford. However, that is not to imply that *MD&TT* is simply another self-serving vanity publication. On the contrary, there are some impressive tales to be found among the 14 collected here (along with two poems), which I can only assume are all original, since no prior publication data is offered.

Esteemed UK novelist Simon Clark, in his introduction to the collection, opines: "Ford's tribute stories in this book to [William Hope] Hodgson are nothing less than brilliant . . . these stories . . . are examples of a new talent, with a voice of his own, that demands to be read, and savored . . . " My reaction is not quite as favorable as Clark's, but fans of Hodgson — and other vintage authors who Ford sometimes emulates, such as Robert W. Chambers and H.P. Lovecraft — can certainly find some diamonds in the rough here.

Clark is on target in his assessment that Ford is at his best while writing in the vein of Hodgson. Tales such as "The Sea of Strangeness", "The Things in the Weed," and "The Cemetery of the Ocean," capture almost perfectly the tone and atmosphere of Hodgson's work. All three of the aforementioned are related via journal entries and are set in the haunted, weed-choked Sargasso Sea around the turn of the century. More often than not, Ford's horrors are of the quiet kind, but he occasionally crescendos, as in the following passage from "The Cemetery of the Ocean:"

> In the torchlight, I had seen only failing vegetation in the shape of stunted trees and bushes. Again I swept the light over the island, but this time something made me focus upon one of the trees. With this I gasped in horror, for contained within the trunk was the pallid white flesh of a deformed human face; its mouth opened wide as it joined a haunting chorus of sorrowful, tortured, moans.

Haunting sounds — this time in the form of music — are the heart of "The Curse," one of the other strong stories here, while "The Illusion of Life" concerns a magician and his undead assistant, utilizing a trick perspective. In "The Enemy Within," a weary, bemused traveler makes the unfortunate decision to stop at a boarding house whose proprietor has been replaced by a less-congenial host.

MD&TT is marred by Ford's occasional attempts to pen humorous tales. To be frank, these efforts aren't . . . they're not . . . they're not good. It's also worth noting that the booklet is not exactly distinguished by the amateurish artwork and typesetting, aspects that can hopefully be addressed before publication of *Ghouls and Gore and Twisted Terrors*, a second Ford collection which BJM intends to bring out.

◆

The Dog Syndrome and Other Sick Puppies by Tom Piccirilli; 1997; 78 pg. chapbook; $8; 500 copies, signed by the author and all six contributing artists.

Black Walls, Red Glass by Jeffrey Thomas; 1997; 66 pg. chapbook; $5.

Marietta Publishing; 1000 Arbor Forest Way; Marietta, GA 30064.

Marietta Publishing is another relatively new entrant in the small press publishing sweepstakes and founder Bruce Gehweiler clearly has major aspirations for the press; significant progress is evident over the course of the seven chapbooks he's published to date. The latest entry, *The Dog Syndrome*, is the first to feature a 2-color, slick cardstock cover, and it's also distinguished by the strength of the fiction within. *TDS* collects six new stories by Piccirilli (author of the novels *Dark Father* and *Shards*, along with the collection, *Pentacle*), and the title story starts things off with a bang, employing offbeat language, that's sometimes disconcerting but often arresting as well. Simultaneously building tension and relating the backstory, the tale concerns an anonymous rendezvous in a pitch-black apartment between the narrator and an enigmatic female stranger, who dialed his number by accident, thus initiating a conversation leading to the pair's assignation. The unusual meeting, and the woman's unusual desires, lead the protagonist to muse:

> Jesus, he'd been in New York for a year and a half and had yet to meet a normal woman. What the hell happened to them down there in the Village, the leather too tight, brains poisoned from the ink of tattoos, piercings going deeper into the matter. She was the victim and purveyor of the loyal dog syndrome, she'd told him, explaining how she needed the roughness of a master more than the touch of a lover.

They arrange to meet in utter darkness, as both parties seem to have features, imagined or otherwise, that they wish to keep secreted away from the light, resulting in a most unusual encounter.

As Piccirilli himself states, the next story, "Fellowship," is "a sort

of strange follow-up" to its predecessor. Seemingly focusing simply on two average Joes talking in a bar, discussing women and dating, "Fellowship" delivers a powerful gut-punch finale. The dark hues grow even darker in "Where the Swamp Folk Go When the Need Comes," which features an engaging doctoral student protagonist — "After eight weeks of researching the [swamp] folk, I still didn't know what I was writing, or even doing in school, or accomplishing here besides rolling in the muck" — whose scholarly thrashings land him in the midst of a bizarre swamp ritual that threatens to engulf him. Piccirilli here mixes some marvelously deranged ideas and some well-placed bits of humor over a substantial foundation of bleakness and horror. "Water Wears the Stones" is an unusual mystery set in a small town in the late '60's, focusing on four teenaged friends whose lives are changed forever when they're caught in the emotional whirlwind that arises suddenly in the wake of some seemingly innocuous events.

Irony, absurdity, and black humor mingle, sometimes uneasily, in "Hostages," which ranks with "Lillith at the Playground" as the two fleas riding on *The Dog Syndrome*, a collection that is otherwise a purebred winner.

•

Jeff Thomas' fiction has been appearing in the small press for several years now, and he's accumulated a fine body of work. As a couple points of fact, his story "Foreign Bodies" was selected for the best-of anthology *Quick Chills II*, and his prior chapbook collection, *Bones of the Old Ones* (Necropolitan, 1995), was an impressive gathering of Cthulhu Mythos-oriented tales.

In *Black Walls, Red Glass*, Thomas casts a wider net, eschewing the Mythos-only approach for a collection of three varied tales that's enhanced by examples of the multi-talented author's own artwork. The lead-off story, "Black Walls," is easily the weakest of the trio. Beginning with a confusing description of a shoot-out in the early morning streets, "Black Walls" focuses on the travails of Johnny Belfast, a wounded survivor of the gunplay. Bleeding, plagued by hallucinations, and despondent over his role in the shooting, Belfast manages to make his way home. The author seems most concerned with pulling the rug out from beneath readers' expectations here — which he does successfully, with a most unexpected ending — but this emphasis comes at the expense of plausible character motivation and internal narrative.

Far more absorbing is "Red Glass," wherein the protagonist recollects from his youth: "An elderly woman lived in the small house near the head of our driveway, and she cared for several disturbed people in her home over the years . . ." As an adult, he buys the house and begins to remodel it, soon discovering that beneath the wallpaper in an upstairs bedroom lies a window into another, alien dimension. It's a brief, creepy tale, utilizing the same theme as "The Boarded Window" from *Bones of the Old Ones*. The final story, "The Red Machine," is by far the longest in the collection, and Thomas utilizes the extra literary real estate to slowly and effectively build atmosphere around the tale of Leslie, a frustrated, disturbed would-be artist who inherits a house, including a basement full of bizarre junk, from her grandmother, and proceeds to piece the odds and ends together into an artistic, and deadly, "wish fulfillment" machine. "The Red Machine" is offbeat and rewarding, and serves as a fine exclamation point for this brief collection.

•

Tales of Sesqua Valley by W.H. Pugmire; 1997; 68 pg. chapbook; $6 (checks payable to Jeffrey Thomas). Necropolitan Press; 65 South St.; Westborough, MA 01581.

When he's not writing or illustrating (as in *Black Walls, Red Glass*, reviewed above), Jeffrey Thomas apparently keeps himself busy as a publisher with his Necropolitan Press imprint. *Tales of Sequa Valley* is the latest chapbook from Necropolitan, featuring ten stories, three of which are original to this publication with most of the reprints apparently having been substantially rewritten for this publication. Author W.H. Pugmire is well known and highly regarded in Lovecraftian circles for his Mythos-inspired work, and *ToSV* offers ample evidence of Pugmire's skills in the area of cosmic horrors. The tales are interconnected, with all but one told via a first-person point-of-view, and feature a strong sense of place, even though the actual environs are somewhat varied.

The general setting, of course, is Sesqua Valley, where the various characters have settled, are returning to, or are visiting. In "Apotheosis," two long-time residents of the valley are joined by a mysterious visitor who winds up transformed by an ancient sculpture that mirrors her appearance:

> She leaned against the statue and kissed its countenance. I watched as she took her face away. I gazed upon the statue's face, its face that was whole, complete, seemed almost alive. I watched as countless cracks etched into the statue, watched as it shattered into danc-

ing dust. I gasped as Selene turned to face me. Where once she had worn a semblance of a face was now nothing but smooth blackness, blackness that seemed unspeakably alive.

A passage in "The Imp of Aether" serves to summarize the role of the valley in these fantastic tales: " . . . the valley is intoxicating, it fires our imagination, our thirst for occult wisdom . . . Seduced forever, we become a part of it . . . This valley is our temple, and our god."

In addition to the milieu, there are other common threads running through these stories: of pervasive influence, subtle and otherwise; of reverence, devoted and unconditional; of lust and longing for transformation, which when it comes is usually embraced.

The last point is important, for although nasty consequences *are* visited upon a couple of characters here, for the most part there is no dark side to the bargains, no horrible punishment for consorting with the supernatural, rendering these tales perhaps more dark fantasy than true horror. "The Child of Dark Mania" is a notable exception, as a reclusive author travels to the titular valley to visit a cousin he has not seen in years, only to find that she is deeply enmeshed in unholy rituals and cross-breeding with monstrous species.

Stilted dialog occasionally detracts from the effect of these stories, but for the most part, Lovecraftian fans will be pleased to visit Sesqua Valley. Excellent artwork by Earl Geier and publisher Thomas round out the package.

•

Cold at Heart by Brian A. Hopkins; 1997; 128 pg. trade pb; $9.95. Sovereign Seal Books; 5104 Cooperstown Ln.; Pasco, WA 99301

I've always been a sucker for a good werewolf story and even though *Cold At Heart* has its flaws, there's more than enough taut, suspenseful writing here to hook me — not to mention some interesting changes on the traditional shapeshifter theme wrung by author Brian Hopkins.

Hopkins, who's been active in the small press for several years now — including the collection, *Something Haunts Us All* (Macabre, Inc., 1995) — has clearly done an estimable amount of research here, not just on the shapeshifter theme; but also on the Arctic, where the story is set; and on Sir John Franklin's 1840s expedition in search of a northwest passage from Europe to Asia, an expedition that serves as the basis for several flashback chapters, in which Hopkins posits a reason for the party's demise that's decidedly different from the historically-assumed cause of starvation. The present-day portion of the storyline focuses on an expedition to Ellesmere Island, manned by biologist and wolf expert David Snow, his lithesome and similarly-academically-inclined daughter Julie, and wildlife photographer Peter Burke, who's still mourning the tragic deaths of his wife and daughter. Once the group spies an unnaturally huge Arctic wolf, it seems the story will settle into a rut of predictable cliches, but Hopkins inserts a few unexpected twists while maintaining breakneck pacing.

There are a few lapses in auctorial judgment, as one seemingly inevitably finds in longer works by newer writers. For example, there's a quick and unlikely declaration of love by Burke for a woman who's largely acted like an ice princess towards him, and some rather wooden speeches by a villainous character, but the action-filled plot builds enough forward momentum to ride out most such rough spots.

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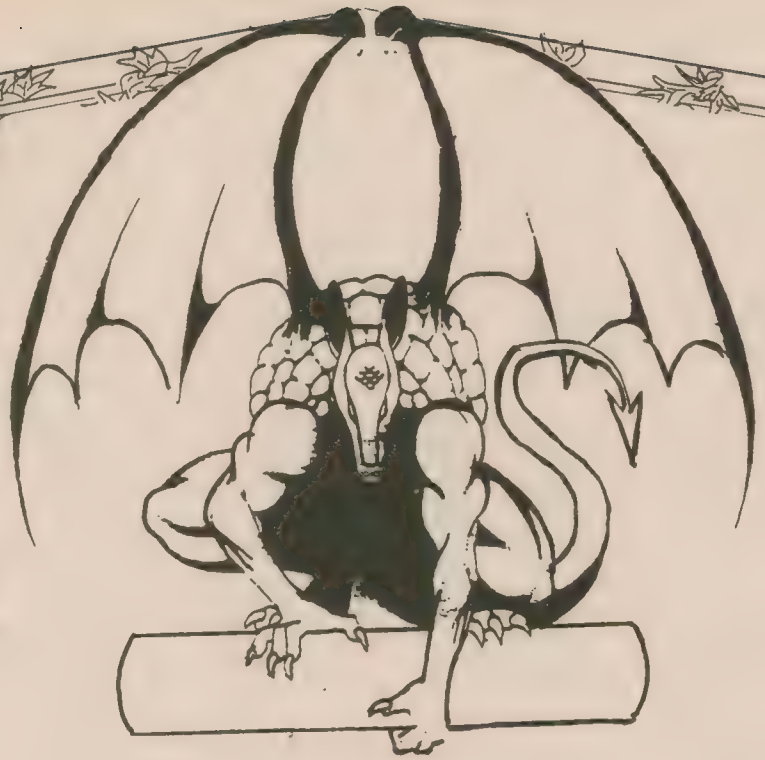
The October Country, by Ray Bradbury; 1997; 336 pg. hardcover; signed, numbered edition of 500 @ $65. Gauntlet Publications; 309 Powell Rd.; Springfield, PA 19064; phone: (610) 328-5476; fax: 328-9949.

It's pretty inconceivable to me that anyone reading *Cemetery Dance* would be unfamiliar with Ray Bradbury, so I'll concentrate on the backstory of this specific book, which is one of the most recent additions to Gauntlet's "Classics Revisited" line. In 1947, Bradbury's first collection, *Dark Carnival*, was published in a small press edition of 3,000 copies, with the contents drawn largely from the author's work from the pulp magazines. Desiring to make several of the stories available to a wider audience, Bradbury published *The October Country* in 1957, including 15 stories from *Dark Carnival*, along with four additional tales.

Consequently, these tales date back as far as 1943, and many were written before Bradbury was 26, although that's certainly no slight on their quality, which is readily evident even after all these decades. Bradbury's work is by turns enchanting and chilling, sometimes seeming to focus on different sides of the same coin, and always entertaining.

In the lighthearted "The Homecoming" and "Uncle Einar," we see supernatural beings who are essentially no different than normal humans, possessing the same emotions and characteristics as the rest of us.



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"The Homecoming" in particular, is a joy, as a boy in a family of supernatural beings is "afflicted" with the curse of a normal, average child, a hardship that the "monsters" around him help him to bear.

An afflicted young boy is also at the center of "The Emissary," but this twist on "A Monkey's Paw" is far from light-hearted as the two most important figures in the bedridden boy's life — his teacher and his dog — are taken from him by death. But he wants them back very badly, very badly indeed . . .

Death takes center stage in "The Scythe," wherein a family of dustbowl migrants happen upon an abandoned farm, complete with a will deeding the property to whoever comes along. The patriarch, Mr. Erickson, comes to realize that by wielding the scythe in the fields he has taken on the job of Death, and he is forced to face the fact that certain stalks of wheat which he must cut represent his own family.

Nostalgia for lost childhood love is at the center of "The Lake," wherein a man returns to the lake where his 12-year-old girlfriend drowned many years previously. His arrival happens to coincide with the discovery of her previously unrecovered remains, making him realize than an aspect of her lives on. In "The Man Upstairs," a young boy, unnerved by a mysterious, apparently vampiric boarder in Grandma's boarding house, brings to bear the knowledge he has gleaned from watching Grandma gut turkeys when seeking to find the boarder's true nature. We are unable to trust what's inside of us in both "Small Assassin" and "The Skeleton." In the former, a pregnant woman is convinced that the child inside of her is an evil entity that wishes her dead, a notion that is of course dismissed by her husband and doctor. In the latter, a man beset by various aches soon becomes obsessed and repulsed by the skeleton within him, which symbolizes his mortality.

A grotesque EC-style twist can be found in "The Jar", in which a put-upon backwoods husband gains revenge on his overbearing wife, who had belittled the "thing" in a jar that the husband had purchased from a carnival sideshow. In "The Crowd," a man is consumed by the idea that a crowd of rubbernecking dead folks habitually gather to observe accidents, and soon finds out the truth of his obsession. "The Next in Line" is a quiet tale that slowly builds a sense of foreboding into an ultimately chilling resolution, as an older married couple, vacationing in Mexico, visit a display of mummies in a small town, leading the wife to become convinced that she is "next in line" to become a mummy, a fear that her unsupportive, uncaring husband does little to deter.

There's even more to like among the 19 stories contained in *The October Country*, a truly impressive collection that should be a cornerstone of any collection of the fantastic. Gauntlet's 40th anniversary edition is further bolstered by an Introduction by Dennis Etchison, an Afterword by Robert McCammon (both of whom sign the book), and a color dustjacket illustrated by Bradbury himself.

*

Running From The Hunter: The Life and Works of Charles Beaumont, by Lee Prosser; 1996; 136 pgs.; hardcover, $29; trade pb, $19. The Borgo Press; P.O. Box 2845; San Bernardino, CA 92406; fax: (909) 888-4942.

Charles Beaumont was a highly-regarded contemporary of Ray Bradbury, contributing some 22 teleplays to Rod Serling's *The Twilight Zone*, authoring several notable film scripts, and publishing acclaimed short fiction in major markets such as *Playboy*. Unfortunately, as Bradbury went on to ever greater heights, Beaumont became a premature victim of Alzheimer's disease, dying in 1967 at the age of 38. Although he's not as well known with contemporary audiences as he deserves to be, his name has been somewhat kept alive by the collections *Best of Beaumont* (Bantam, 1982) and *Charles Beaumont: Selected Stories* (Dark Harvest, 1988); and a forthcoming selection of previously uncollected work from a small press that I can't yet name (no signed contracts, and all that) promises to be a major genre event in 1999.

Running From The Hunter provides a survey of Beaumont's work, including commentary on all of the author's published short fiction, along with a chronology, biography, bibliography, and index. In short, all of the ingredients are present to make this a valuable reference work. Sadly, the ingredients don't make for a satisfying whole. In particular, the biographical section displays a notable lack of insight, seeming like a rather schizophrenic cross between a superficial high school term paper and a pompous doctoral dissertation. In the superficial category, Prosser offers off-the-cuff assessments such as "Beaumont was a people person" and "[was] known as a sexual athlete," without further elaboration. An annoying example of the tendency towards pretension can be seen in Prosser's insistence on using the word "sensate" on practi-

cally every page. The annotated overview of Beaumont's short fiction, which is by far the longest section in the book, is somewhat more useful, although some of Prosser's theories on the stories' symbolism seem a tad far-fetched, with nothing to back them up.

Prosser is certainly very well-read when it comes to his subject matter, but *Running From The Hunter* is a disappointingly shallow look at a fascinating writer's career.

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The Exit at Toledo Blade Boulevard by Jack Ketchum; 1998; 212 pg. hardcover; 500 copy edition, $45; 52 copy edition $150. Obsidian Press; 37800 38th Ave. S; Auburn, WA 98001; email: MJobsidian@aol.com.

Although Jack Ketchum's first novel appeared back in 1981 and he now has 11 titles to his credit, it's only been in the last couple of years that Ketchum has begun to accumulate a cult following and a great deal of genre buzz around his name, as evidenced by the recent interest in his work from small press publishers. *The Exit at Toledo Blade Boulevard* is one of four recent Ketchum books that have appeared or are scheduled to appear from the small press; it's also the first collection of the author's shorter work. I must confess that, up till now, I've eschewed a position on the Ketchum bandwagon, not because I didn't like his work, but rather because I simply hadn't had a chance to read any of it.

Well, make room on the wagon and call me a convert.

Ketchum is both a highly literate and powerfully evocative writer, and *TE@TBB* is a magnificent showcase of his work, collecting twelve tales and a somewhat unexpected but most welcome essay on Henry Miller.

Several of the stories revolve around vengeance, as in "Mail Order," where a devotee of slasher films endlessly searching for a true "snuff" film receives his just rewards; or the bittersweet "When the Penny Drops," a pleasantly languid tale that takes an unexpectedly nasty turn towards the end; or "The Rose," arguably the only supernatural tale here, wherein a victim of kidnap and prolonged abuse is finally able to turn the tables on her captor.

Vengeance is not exactly the theme of "The Rifle," but a sort of retribution is, as Ketchum alludes to in his introduction to the story: "This story came about as a result of a conversation . . . in which we both were venting our considerable frustration with the parents of certain serial killers who never seem to own up to what little Junior's gone and done . . . " Long-time Ketchum fans should particularly appreciate "Winter Child," which was originally intended to be a chapter in his novel *She Wakes*. It's a claustrophobic bit about a strange and silent girl who's taken in during a winter storm by a widowed man and his young son, who suspects the girl's true nature. "Snakes" was written for *Fear Itself*, an anthology in which "horror writers [were asked] to write about what specifically scared them, about just exactly what wakes their sorry asses up in the middle of the night . . . " As someone who's not overly fond of serpents myself, I can testify that Ketchum is right on target with this tale. The title story is perhaps the collection's crown jewel, masterfully rotating perspective and creating empathy with several characters while at the same time building a sense of foreboding and impending doom for at least one of them.

Given Ketchum's recent collectability, this one is likely to go fast. Don't miss *The Exit at Toledo Blade Boulevard*.

•

The Lovecraft Tarot by David Wynn and Daryl Hutchinson, illustrator; 1997; 78 card deck; $29.95 + 4.00 shipping. Mythos Books; 2118 Hickory Meadow Lane; Poplar Bluff, MO 63901; email: dwynn@ldd.net.

David Wynn, proprietor of mail order bookseller Mythos Books and editor/publisher of the 'zine *Mythos Tales*, here ventures into slightly more unusual publishing territory, with this H.P. Lovecraft-inspired deck of 78 Tarot cards. Diversely illustrated by the talented pen of Daryl Hutchinson, the deck is printed in two colors on 4.25 x 5.5 card stock, with the back of each card featuring a likeness of Lovecraft's haunted visage. The various Cthulhu Mythos-oriented illustrations are uniformly entertaining and often inspired. The cards are accompanied by a 12 page booklet describing the five aspects of the Tarot — the Major Arcana, the Suit of Artifacts, the Suit of Sites, the Suit of Tomes, and the Suit of Man — and includes descriptions of individual cards such as "The Yellow Sign — confusion or despair" and "Kadath — a place of loss; lost dreams."

This unique item is obviously not for everyone, but Cthulhu Mythos fans and Tarot enthusiasts alike should find this deck well worth investigating.

— CD —

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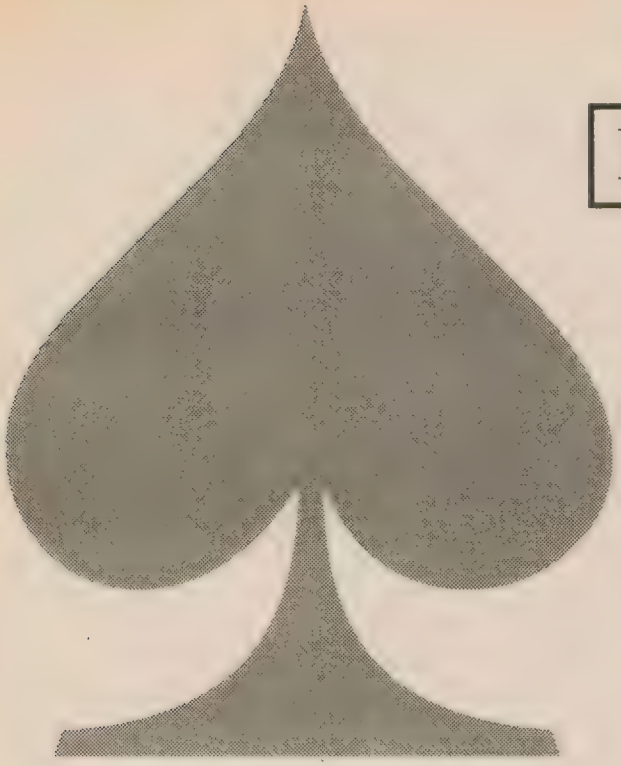

Four of a Kind

Bryn Kanar

Bryn Kanar is a young writer, living in California. We're pleased to be publishing one of his first stories in the pages of *CD*.

I left two men dead in Scarlet, Pennsylvania.

•

Gypsy and I trudged through a light rain until we came to a spotlessly clean apartment building on the south side of the city. I fished a soggy scrap of paper out of my jeans pocket and double-checked the address. 2101 Hubbard. We marched into the lobby and I buzzed room 417. The voice of an old woman crackled electrically out of the wall.

"Yes?"

"Hello," I said. "Mrs. LaMarchine? This is Jack."

"Oh, hi, Jack. We've been waiting. The others are all here. Come on up." Then a buzz and we entered the building and took the elevator to the fourth floor.

•

They had been drinking and breaking bottles on the tracks. Wasn't their fault really. How could they know the Jack of Clubs was trying to get some sleep a few freight cars away?

Besides, it wasn't even them who woke me up. Not directly. They woke up a stray dog and she came whining around my car looking for a quiet spot to lay her flea-bitten head. It was against my principles to cut her throat: I'm an animal lover. But I love my sleep more than just about anything. Dreams reshuffle the deck; every dawn is a new deal, and everyone knows interrupting the dealer is just a plain bad idea.

•

The door was opened by a normal-looking older woman. Her hair was dyed brown and stacked on top of her head in a style twenty years out of date. She wore an uncomfortable-looking polyester pants suit. I couldn't put my finger on it, but something about her bothered me.

"Come in," she said, opening the door to reveal the interior of her modest apartment. She caught sight of Gypsy and frowned. "Yours?" she asked.

"This is Gypsy," I said, stepping inside. She patted her politely on the head then shook my hand.

"Call me Roberta," she said. "Is it OK if your dog stays here by the door? The carpet—you understand."

I nodded. Roberta closed the door. I spread out my jacket on the square of linoleum in front of the door and Gypsy settled onto it with her usual stoic sigh. She still hadn't dropped her litter and had trouble getting comfortable on the hard floor.

"Why don't you go on in and introduce yourself to the others?" Roberta said. "I'll get a bowl of water for, uh, Gypsy was it?"

That's when I noticed her hands.

They were flawless, the hands of a twenty year old. As she turned, I took a quick inventory of the rest of her. In every other way she resembled a woman in her seventies at least. Her back was slightly hunched. Her face was wrinkled and splotched with age spots and broken blood vessels. Her left eye was milky with cataracts, though her right one was clear.

I took off my pack and my shoes trying to re-

member the rumors I had heard about Roberta LaMarchine.

•

So, half asleep, I pulled my knife and reached for her, but before I struck I noticed two things: the drunks laughing like hyenas just down the tracks and the dog's distended belly. She was pregnant.

Killing her would net me more ghosts than I bargained for and wouldn't even buy me a ticket back to dreamland given the other source of noise. So I sighed and laid out my jacket in the dusty freight car and enticed her over to it with the butt end of my Hershey's with Almonds. She ate the chocolate but spit out the nuts, sniffed them at length, then shook her head decisively, and dropped her long snout onto her crossed forepaws.

She was a big dog with a little bit of everything in her: nose like a spitz, tail like a husky, and who knew what all in between.

"I'm going to call you Gypsy," I said. "How do you like that name, old girl?" She gave me a sad-eyed look and sighed. I patted her head, pocketed the almonds, and went to pay a visit to the hyenas.

•

I had spoken with a few people who had played against Roberta LaMarchine in the past. Their reports were all the same: she could bluff you out of a full house with nothing but a pair of twos and never bat an eyelash; she was ruthless, would probably wager her grandchildren's freedom without thinking twice; she had a constant stream of strange substances and arcane devices crossing her gaming table. It was this last that had drawn me to seek her out.

No one had said anything about her having hands fifty years too young.

•

Some people say I have no heart. That's not true. If the two men I killed that night could speak, they would give testimony to my kindness. I slit their throats swiftly and painlessly, and under each of their tongues I left a Canadian quarter to pay Death's ferryman. He won't take U.S. currency. Don't ask me why.

I waited with them until I heard Charon's oars stirring the dark water of the Styx. You wouldn't have heard it if you'd been there. I'm extremely sensitive. That's why I stick to the shadows. Sunlight hurts my eyes. It's also what makes me good at murder, making love, and playing cards.

It takes a sensitive eye to tell when a really good player is bluffing; the slight twitch of an eyelid, dilation of a pupil, tiny tremor of the forefinger, can give it all away. The ear helps too. Each card has its own sound. Sometimes I can hear the difference between a king of diamonds and a trey of spades as they come sliding smooth as ice off the top of the deck and into an opponent's hand. But only sometimes, and only if it's very quiet, which poker games usually aren't.

Well, it was quiet now on the outskirts of Scarlet, thanks to me. Quiet enough to hear the hypnotizing dip and pull of Charon's oars. Quiet enough to fall asleep.

The creak of the oars in the oarlocks. The swish of water on wood. The faint thump of a boat against a sandy shore.

Then an owl called, just in time, its voice like thunder compared to the near silence of the other world, and I stumbled to my feet and walked stiffly away.

I would hate for Charon to have found three sleepers waiting for him. I only had two coins and someone would have had to stay behind.

Strolling back along the tracks I ate the damp almonds one by one, hoping the dog had left some residue of chocolate on them. She hadn't. Even worse, when I got back to the freight car I discovered she had eaten half my deck of cards.

I pulled the seven of diamonds out of Gypsy's mouth. "Bad girl," I scolded, but my heart wasn't in it. Pregnant women can have cravings, why not dogs? And Gypsy was about as pregnant as they come. She was panting a mile a minute, as if she could drop her litter any time. It didn't look like either of us would get much sleep that night after all.

•

Roberta's perfect hands were puzzling but what did I expect from a woman known as "The Witch of Tennessee?" Perhaps, I thought, this would be just the first of several surprises.

As it turned out, the next one was waiting for me in the living room.

I retrieved my stash from various pockets of my pack, padded across the plush carpet, and stopped dead in my tracks. There at the table was Gilbert Wain. All three hundred pounds of him.

He seemed as surprised as I was, but he hid his disappointment well. We had met across the poker table perhaps half a dozen times when I used to haunt the New York area. Over time we had developed a healthy mutual respect and soon entered into an unspoken treaty that allowed us to stop fighting each other and focus on the more vulnerable prey: we sim-

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ply avoided sitting in on the same game. I could tell that the sight of me had already caused him to cut in half what he expected to take home with him tonight. Reluctantly, I would have to revise my own estimate as well. Gilbert was a savvy card player, as hard to read as a Chinese newspaper. He rose and pumped my hand.

"Good to see you, Jack," he beamed convincingly. "Roberta said someone else was coming but she was being mysterious and I never guessed it was you. It's been, what—six years? Seven?" He introduced me to the other two men at the table with a flourish of his beefy arm, "gentlemen, meet the Jack of Clubs."

A nervous young man in a suit and tie rose and shook my hand. "Morris McVitty," Gilbert said. "The curator of the Illinois Asian Pacific Museum."

The other man at the table remained seated. I reached over and shook his hand. It was as cold as ice. "Mr. Anthony Kronar," Gilbert explained, "of the Panax Corporation."

Roberta came into the room and we all sat down. After a few more minutes of small talk we each produced the stakes we were taking to the table. I was not disappointed.

McVitty opened his briefcase and removed perhaps twenty statuettes of obscure oriental deities. A few were cast in gold. Most were carved in crystal and jade.

Gilbert had some similar pieces which he had won off McVitty in an earlier game, as well as six Italian Renaissance daggers and a road map of the island of Sardinia which he claimed would lead its owner to an underground treasure left behind by Nazis in World War II.

"X marks the spot," he said defensively in response to our chuckles.

Kronar was the only one who didn't laugh. It turned out he had a World War II treasure of his own to show us: German coins minted by the Third Reich, in perfect condition, each one showing a profile or three-quarters view of *Der Fuhrer*.

I displayed the assortment of potions and rare poisons I had assembled especially for this game.

But Roberta had the best offerings of any of us: uncut diamonds and other precious stones, the largest of which was the size of a well-fed guinea pig.

We haggled for over an hour, establishing the relative value of the objects on the table, writing everything down on a sheet of paper. Roberta told us the house rules and wrote these down as well. We all signed our names at the bottom. Then Roberta fetched a deck of cards and began to shuffle.

Again, my attention was drawn to her perfect hands. I caught Gilbert's eyes and raised an eyebrow. He had followed my gaze but he lit a cigarette and looked away. His mouth was curled into its usual smirk but his eyes held an edge of fear.

•

Always gives me the shivers, that train whistle. Too much like the call of a living thing and not a mating call either. More like a hunting call. But what have I got to worry about? I'm already in the belly of the beast.

Across the grey Potomac, under the dirty toenails of the Appalachian foothills, morning finally caught up with us in the rolling country of West Virginia. Morning and the smell of rain.

I rolled over and cracked the door of the freight car; sure enough, rain clouds, tilted at a crazy angle, racing the train into the lowlands. I glanced over at my companion. Asleep. Still no pups. But it wouldn't be long now. We had both nodded off near dawn, just after the train got going – the rhythm of the steel cradle is hard to resist – and I felt rested and ready for a challenge.

We made Jeffersonville, Kentucky by midday. I left Gypsy down by the station and insinuated myself into town to find some chocolate for me and some dog food for her. Even though it was overcast, the light got to me. Just in time, I found a little mom-and-pop market and stumbled like a wino into the shade. A man can get drunk on daylight.

"Hey now, son," said the pop – fortunately the mom was nowhere in sight – "looks like you could use a cup of coffee." He shambled down the aisle wiping his hands on an apron so dirty it could only make matters worse, and positioned himself behind a worn-out checkout counter.

"No," I said, pulling myself together. "What I really need is a good raincoat. It's going to be coming down in buckets in a few minutes."

"I don't think so," said Pop, stroking his nonexistent beard. "Rains at night usually. These parts. This time of year."

"I know weather," I said. "It's going to dump any minute. You can bet on it."

"Well, I know the weather of this valley. I've lived in Jeffersonville forty years. And I'm telling you we won't get a drop before nightfall." He let one dirty hand fall meaningfully, palm down, on the linoleum countertop and gave me a slit-eyed look. I stared right back, making my challenge plain.

"I'll bet you a day's labor against a can of Purina and a box of chocolate-covered donuts we get rain in the next ten minutes," I said.

We shook hands and looked at our watches.

In five minutes the thunder hit. In eight minutes the first drops started to fall.

In an hour, bellies full, Gypsy and I were on another train, bound for Nashville.

•

I played the first few rounds automatically. I couldn't get my mind off Roberta's hands. But when I saw Gilbert greedily clawing in the first large pot of the evening I shrugged off my worries and concentrated on my cards.

I was holding kings. I saw Kronar's bet. Everyone stayed. I threw away two cards and pulled an ace. Not a bad hand but there was probably something better out there. Kronar made another small bet. Almost too small. He probably had something but I stayed in anyway to keep my options open. McVitty and Gilbert dropped. Roberta saw and raised, adding Gilbert's treasure map, which she had won in an earlier hand, to the pot.

Kronar was like a statue but the little vein on the side of his head was going a mile a minute. He had something, but he thought the witch might have better. And he wanted that map. He pushed forward a big stack of Hitler coins. I laid down my cards. Roberta raised again, sliding two uncut rubies slowly to the center of the table.

To anyone else Kronar would have looked as impassive as a glacier, but I saw right through the facade. His feet shifted minutely on the carpet. The muscles of his throat constricted. He turned his cards face down on the table.

Roberta raked in her winnings. She meant to break us one by one.

But Gilbert won a big pot from her next hand, including the Kwan Yin statuette she had won off McVitty, and things settled down into the normal give-and-take rhythm of most poker games.

The only steady loser was McVitty. I figured he was one of that breed of poker player who almost enjoys losing; it's a kind of masochistic self-flagellation that's more common than you might think.

After a while we came to a natural lull in the game and Roberta brought out snacks: chips and dip and little sandwiches on a tray. Gilbert didn't touch anything—I had never seen him eat, which struck

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me as odd for a man his size—but he did open another pack of cigarettes. The rest of us ate hungrily. We all resumed play newly energized.

Gilbert began to spin his patented web of cigarette smoke, which he believed would hide the nuances of his facial expressions. I could see through it but still I wasn't winning. It was Roberta who pulled in pot after pot. And she didn't even look at us. She didn't care what we had. As the game progressed, she displayed more and more the kind of reckless courage that only the lucky, the bluffers, and the card cheats possess.

Well, I knew she wasn't cheating and I thought her winning streak was a little too long to be due to luck alone. One of us would have to challenge her.

Around midnight McVitty went for the jugular. He bet high. Gilbert and Roberta stayed. Kronar and I folded. They took their cards and McVitty bet high again, making the largest pot we had seen that night. Gilbert dropped out but Roberta didn't even blink. "I'm feeling lucky tonight, gentlemen," she explained as she pushed a huge pile of loot into the center of the table. McVitty folded with a sob. I thought he'd probably had the better hand. But it's hard to keep betting against an opponent who has no fear.

A few hands later McVitty went bust and took his leave. He had one of Kronar's coins so the evening wasn't a complete wash, but he had dropped every one of his statuettes, most of them to Gilbert.

With McVitty gone, Roberta redoubled her attack, with Kronar and me the big losers. Gilbert stayed barely ahead.

"Damn the luck," said Kronar at last, but quietly, as if talking to himself. It was the only hint of emotion he had shown all night.

"It's not luck," I said. "You should read a book by a Louisiana gentleman, name of Cunningham. It's called *The Art of the Bluff in Draw Poker.*"

Kronar gave me the kind of look usually reserved for cockroaches and spiders. "You're losing too."

"Yes," I said, "but at least I know why I'm losing."

"I hate to disturb your little tête-à-tête," Gilbert interrupted, parting his curtain of smoke with a wave of his hand, "but would you jokers cut the crap and cut the cards?" Kronar obliged him. Roberta was silent, her perfect hands lying on the table to either side of her huge pile of winnings.

I stared at her hands as Kronar dealt. She picked up her cards. She was looking right at me.

We played that hand in silence. Gilbert and Kronar dropped early. Roberta raised me in the second round of betting when I obviously had a good hand. I called her with aces and queens. She had three threes.

Even Gilbert started to lose his cool.

•

As the train thundered through the long afternoon, I rifled through the various compartments of my frame pack, sorting my stash. Each item I pulled out brought back memories of past games, the expressions on people's faces as they lost what they valued most. And behind each of these memories were hundreds more, stretching back to the dawn of gambling.

As far back as I dare to remember, I hear the sounds of shuffling cards, copper coins clicking on the tabletop, bets and curses in languages long dead. Sometimes I am visited by memories of Chinese emperors wagering kingdoms on the turn of a card, or silk road brigands playing for horses and swords. Sometimes I see a face and am reminded of an Indian raja who lost his daughter at the gaming table. Or was it his son?

More clearly, I recall a Venetian noble, imprisoned in a tower, playing endless hands of tarrochi with his guards, hoping to win his freedom. I don't remember if he did, but I remember the cards he played with, especially one called The Magician. The character on the card held a cup in one hand and a magic wand in the other.

In French decks there was a similar card, The Knight of Wands. Though not a member of the major arcana, still that card holds a certain power over me. I seem to remember riding a horse such as the knight on that card rode. I seem to remember the weight of a rapier at my side, the taste of French vowels in my throat. I seem to remember a magic wand in my hand.

But all these are dim memories. What is certain is that I played in New Orleans back when anteing was for amateurs and seven stud was yet to be invented. I played the high stakes games in New York, Gardena, and Vegas, and I usually won.

But eventually the game got boring and I graduated to the life of a hobo and a poker game played not for money but for those elusive objects money can't buy.

With everything sorted into its appropriate pile I went and sat by Gypsy, stroking her bristly, mottled hair, listening to her labored breathing. "Hang in there, Gypsy Dog," I said. "It won't be long now." She set her heavy head on my leg and waited.

•

By four in the morning Kronar was gone and I had made so many trips to my pack that most of what I owned was sitting across the table in front of

Roberta or behind her on the coffee table which she had pulled up to hold her extra winnings. I didn't care so much about the things I'd lost. It was my pride that was hurting. I wanted to catch her raising me when she had nothing. I wanted to snare her in the kind of trap she'd been springing on us. I wanted to bring her to her knees and break her.

A few hands later I got my chance.

Gilbert dealt me a king, three queens, and a jack. Roberta bet high knowing that by now we would just drop out unless we had something. I saw and raised. Gilbert stayed and Roberta raised, playing her usual cutthroat style. I had her like a fish on a hook. All I had to do was reel her in.

I threw away the king and the jack. Several times in the course of the night I had drawn two cards to a pair and the showdown had proved that I had done so. I hoped Roberta would guess I was doing the same again. Gilbert gave me two more cards: a queen and a three.

I had four of a kind.

Roberta gave me a look that was almost pitying as she pushed her huge bet into the center of the table. I had her.

There were very few hands in poker that could beat what I had. I knew she didn't have four kings because I had thrown away a king. That left four aces or a straight flush. I didn't think she had either of those hands. I couldn't tell anything by looking at her—she might as well have been made of stone—but the laws of probability were about as highly in my favor as was possible. I saw her bet and raised. Gilbert dropped out and wandered off toward the kitchen. I thought Roberta would finally give in but when I looked up I saw she was smiling.

"You thought you could catch me," she said, "but once again I've caught you." She saw my bet and slid a huge raise into the center of the table. Most of her winnings for the night were in the pot.

"I can't match that," I stammered.

"Well, I'm sorry then, Jack, but you're going to have to fold," she said, still radiating deadly calm. "House rules."

I began to turn to solicit Gilbert's help but before I could, she said, "There is one thing you have that can match my bet."

"What's that?" I asked.

"Your left eye."

"What?"

"You heard what I said, Jack. Come on now. Don't be selfish. Why do you think you were born with two eyes, two hands, two kidneys, if not to share?"

My tongue felt heavy. I couldn't speak. A moment ago I had felt like the fisherman but now I knew I was the fish.

"And if you win, of course, all this," she said, passing one of her perfect hands over the pile on the table. I couldn't take my eyes away from her hand. I felt sick to my stomach. I felt dizzy.

I looked at my cards again, hands shaking. Four queens. She can't beat it. It's just one eye.

With a kind of horror, I could feel the muscles of my neck tensing, getting ready to nod an agreement. I could feel my tongue moving to say the word "yes." But it wasn't my voice I heard. It was Gilbert's.

"Hey, Jack," he said, "there's something wrong with your dog."

•

On legs like half-cooked spaghetti, I stood and pushed my chair back. My dog? I turned and walked across the room, aware of Roberta's presence behind me. Rounding the corner, I saw Gilbert squatting—not an easy position for a three hundred pound man—next to where Gypsy lay by the door.

She was on her side, panting as if it were 102 degrees. There was blood on my jacket and on the linoleum. I got into position to catch the first puppy.

But the puppy didn't come.

Gilbert stood with difficulty, his face white as a sheet. "I'll boil water," he said, disappearing into the kitchen. Roberta was silent. We waited.

After a while Gilbert returned with a small pot of steaming water. He set the pot down and kneeled on the carpet. "What else can I do?" he asked. While I was looking at him, the first puppy fell into my hands.

"That's the way, old girl." I stroked her fur and she sighed, shifted her weight, and started to pant again. "Paper towels," I said.

Gilbert struggled to rise but Roberta put a hand on his shoulder to stop him and went to get the paper towels from the kitchen. I dipped a towel in the warm water and started to wipe the slime off the tiny newborn.

We all saw it at the same instant. The mark on the puppy's side. It was diamond-shaped and brown. But we didn't have time to gawk. Two more pups came out in quick succession. One had a heart-shaped mark, the other had what looked like a spade on its side.

Gypsy licked the last puppy clean herself. On its flank, as black as on any playing card, was the mark of clubs. They were four of a kind, four aces.

I looked up at Roberta. She glared at me. For once, I could read the expression on her face: pure hatred. Gilbert's face mirrored my own astonishment. Gypsy sat with her eyes closed, contented.

"Gilbert," I said, "keep an eye on the puppies for me. I've got a poker game to finish." Roberta and I walked back to the living room, sat, and picked up our cards. "Now, where were we?" I asked.

"Your eye," Roberta reminded me in an acid voice.

I glanced at my four queens, then across the table at the cards in Roberta's young hands. "I fold," I said, and laid my cards face down on the table.

Roberta pounded the table with her fists, toppling her winnings onto the floor. "Out!" she screamed. "Both of you get out of my house. And don't let me see you around here again, ever!" Gilbert and I were only too glad to oblige.

I bundled up the pups in my jacket and we rode the elevator down. Neither of us was in the mood to dwell on what had just happened so we parted on the street corner. "Craziest damn game I ever played in," was all Gilbert said before lumbering over to his car.

•

The rain had stopped but Gypsy was exhausted and it was a long walk to the train station. Still, I knew we would make it. We took it slow, pausing whenever we needed to rest. The way I figured it, we would catch a freight to California. I knew folks out there who would put up a lot for the chance to win one of these pups, or the mother who gave birth to them. All but the ace of clubs. I was keeping that one.

The sun was rising over the run-down buildings of Nashville's south side when a train whistle whined up ahead. Gypsy and I increased our pace. The pups were bundled in my jacket, sound asleep. My arms burned from carrying them, but at least my pack was light for once.

I had just lost everything I owned, but somehow I didn't mind. I felt like the luckiest man in the world.

– CD –

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A Conversation with

MICHAEL MARSHALL SMITH

by Chris Smith

Going Spare

CD: What prompted you to start writing?

MMS: It's something that I've always had in mind because my dad's a writer, albeit of non-fiction. He's an academic, and has written a great deal on social inequality, geographical distribution and recently on morality. I wrote a lot of comedy sketches at university and thought that might be an interesting thing to do, but just at the end of college I began to lose interest in the straightforward comedy thing and decided that prose writing, particularly horror, would be more interesting.

CD: So how did your first break come about?

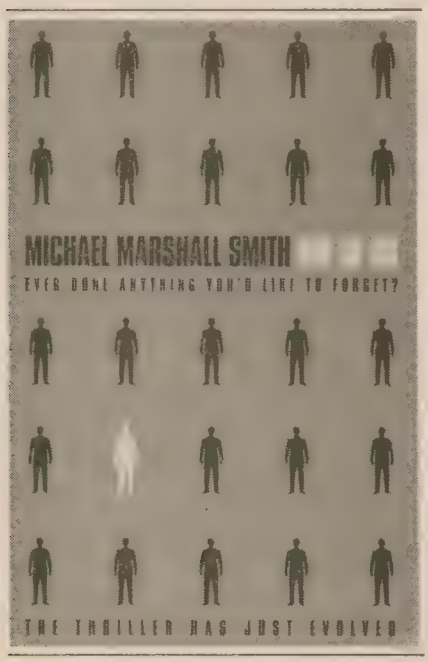
MMS: There was a joint first break, in that the first story accepted was "The Dark Land" which Nicholas Royle took for the anthology which he subsequently called *Dark Lands*. That wasn't the first story to be actually published, though. I met Nick when we were both working at a company called IVCA. We got on immediately and he gave me the address of Clarence Paget, who was publishing *The Pan Book of Horror*, so I sent a story along to him. He had either died, or stopped, or lost interest or something so Kathy Gale passed it along to Steve Jones, who was just about to do *Dark Voices*, and he took it for *Dark Voices* 2. That story [The Man Who Drew Cats] went on to win the British Fantasy Award for Best Short Story. So either way I probably owe my first break to Nick, like so many other people.

CD: You made your name through a number of disturbing, and highly affecting, horror short stories: "The Man Who Drew Cats;" "The Dark Land;" "Later;" "To Receive is Better;" "More Tomorrow," for example. Which are your particular favorite short stories among your own work, and why?

MMS: Sometimes I like ones that nobody else does, and sometimes I'll write ones that I think are rather minor and yet people like them. I tend to like the ones which I think, within the limitations of my skill at any one time, more or less did what I wanted them to do. If I was compiling a short story collection – which I will indeed be doing in the near future – I would certainly include all of the stories you mentioned in the question. I would also add "Hell Hath Enlarged Herself," "Always," "Foreign Bodies," "Not Waving," "The Owner," and "To See the Sea." You can generally tell with stories as you're actually writing them: some of them seem to have scale, some of them are smaller. That's not the same as people liking them, though: the story I most liked when I'd finished it, and which I still thinks works amongst the best, is "More Bitter than Death." This wasn't selected for any "Best Of's," and nobody mentions it when they tell me they like a particular group of stories, but I hope that's because it's actually amongst the most effective, and really not very nice . . .

CD: Would you ever want to try to write a horror-centered novel, or can effective horror writing, from your own point of view, only exist within the short form?

MMS: I'd love to write a horror-centered novel. It was horror-centered novels, in the shape of one Mr. S. King, that galvanized me to start writing in the first place. The problem is that a large part of writing a horror novel would have to be the intention to disturb people over the whole of its length — and I think that's next to impossible with a novel. King has done it, with *The Shining*, *Pet Sematary* and a couple of others. Shirley Jackson did it with *The Haunting of Hill House* and *We Have Always Live in the Castle*.



Lovecraft did it in *At the Mountains of Madness*. But it ain't easy — and you'll notice that most of the above are pretty short novels. Most long horror novels, it seems to me, are actually dark fantasy stories with horror sections — rather than HORROR. With the notable exceptions listed above, and a few others, I think the best straight-down-the-line HORROR is usually found in the short form.

CD: The most potent form of horror within your work so far seems to stem from your characters' own subconscious. Do you feel that that is the only valid way for you to project horror within your writing?

MMS: There are so many things in life which are sources of horror that you can avoid. Don't go into that small dark room at the top of the stairs, for example. If a bunch of friends say "Hey, let's rent a log cabin in the woods for the weekend," don't do it. Just say no. Do not go. Whereas if you have something unpleasant locked away in your unconscious or seeping into your consciousness, then there's no escape. You cannot get away from it. You can't stop thinking about it, and worse still, it may make you act in ways you abhor. But you can't do anything about that, either. Your internal past is immutable. To me, the bad things you have done or had done to you in your life are far more scary than the fact that if I'm stupid enough to go into the small dark room at the top of the stairs then something mildly supernatural and largely incredible might stick a claw in me.

Good horror novels have all the internal mechanisms working but also had some credible external threat. Stephen King is, of course, the master at that. I try to achieve the same kind of thing by looking inside characters, and their back-stories and their responses to what is around them — but putting them in very different situations. The same effect can be achieved in many different ways. Look at a film like *Halloween*, for example: the way it's shot, those long, lingering medium long shots down streets and the very careful timing of the editing. The cinematic language of that movie is a metaphorical version of the same processes at work. It opens up the part of the mind which is receptive to the off-beam and disturbing. From the direction I'm coming from it's more interesting for me to do it from a psychological standpoint than to try to come up with a new Freddy. Though I'm sure my bank manager might favor the "finding a new Freddy" approach . . .

CD: Do you feel that horror has been ghettoized, and therefore undergoes closer scrutiny as to what objective it fulfills?

MMS: I'm sorry to go on about this, but a mainstream novel

doesn't have to fulfill a function - so why should a horror or SF novel? It just happens to be yet another advantage of our genres that it can deal with all the personal and emotional and conceptual things that a mainstream novel can, but it can also tackle some more deep-rooted concerns which a lot of mainstream novels don't get around to.

CD: Your writing works almost in reverse. With *Only Forward* (Mr. Smith's first novel) we have this rollercoaster ride

through salmon's darkest fantasies, yet within is this almost Proustian image of love regained. Within the near-future bedlam of *Spares* there is a powerful theme of redemption and atonement swimming just below the surface. There are extremely profound statements within your writing; is this the most important element to your work?

MMS: Yes. I'm far more interested in trying to say something about the way in which someone who doesn't like themselves very much can try to redeem their personality, than I am necessarily about talking fridges. I like the talking fridge bits very much, because they amuse me, and I hope that it will amuse other people, but the bigger issues are the core. The thing is — if I tried to write about those issues within a mainstream novel I couldn't be fucked. Middle-aged people having affairs with each other and agonizing about the au pairs isn't an interesting enough canvas. With horror or science fiction or dark fantasy or crime not only can you do the "quality" stuff but you can have fun with all the other things: you can have your talking fridges and people running around with guns and weird creatures out of the night. Philip K. Dick, for example, was dealing with ideas that are far more interesting than those you'll find in most mainstream novels, but he did them in very weird science fiction. James Ellroy's *The Black Dahlia* packs an unbelievable emotional punch, but it's crime. If you can have that as well then why not have it? It's a way of keeping me entertained, and a way of keeping other people entertained, whilst dealing with the big stuff.

CD: Your books really defy categorization into any genre. How do you feel about the possibility of being categorized as one particular style of writer?

MMS: I know that I'm not going to be able to avoid writing with bits of crime, and bits of horror, bits of SF and bits of mainstream. I read all of them and I want to write books that I would like to read. It will be interesting to see whether or not I can get away with resolutely ignoring these labels. I wouldn't mind being categorized if it didn't put people off, but sadly it does, particularly mainstream readers. There's nothing pejorative about being labeled as mainstream, whereas SF or Horror books are thought of as the preserve of dweebs.

CD: You seem very bullish about genre fiction, as opposed to "mainstream."

MMS: I am. I'm sick and fucking tired of apologizing for the fact that my stuff is set in the future, or has weird things in it. There comes a point in people's lives, it would appear, when they can't seem to think or talk about anything except three things: houses; marriage; babies. This is what mainstream fiction is for. It's for people whose horizons have contracted so far that anything which goes beyond them becomes inexplicable. Strangely, it's different in film. People will go in droves to see *Independence Day* (SF), *Jurassic Park* (SF), *Silence of the Lambs* (horror), *Seven* (crime/horror). They'll sit and watch The "X-Files" and "Morse" and "Murder One" on television. And so will I. Fine. But in bookstores? Oh no. We don't go to the genre sections. Why? Horror, SF and crime have access to a whole wealth of ideas, symbolism and traditions which mainstream fiction can't even touch. They can cover relationships, philosophy, the endless variation of life — and raise it to levels which mainstream novels simply don't have available to them. They can move people, scare them, instill them with that all too rare thing — a sense of wonder. So what is this problem that people have with genre fiction?

I'll tell you what. They grew up. They stopped wondering how long infinity is, and worry instead about how long it is until they're promoted. They stopped being afraid of what's under the bed, and started being afraid of their paunch. The only time they think about crime is when they worry whether their area is part of Neighborhood Watch. And yet that stuff is still out there. The universe. Death. Murder. All the big subjects, the ones which cut at the heart of what it is to be human, what it is to be alive. I'm actually writing mainstream books, as far as I'm concerned. I want to write novels which are of sufficient quality to hold their heads up in any drawing room or literary launch, but which retain a sense of wonder, of the unknown, of the impossible, of the frightening and funny currents which run through everyone's life. If that means they end up being set in the future, or feature a crime, or have things which seem impossible, so be it. And if mainstream readers can go with that, great. If not, fuck 'em. They can catch up in ten years time, when the ideas we're writing about now are common place. Everyone's getting really excited about the possibilities of the Internet right now; and yet *Neuromancer* was published a decade ago. It's like, "Yes, hello — we already know about this stuff. Weren't you guys listening?"

CD: In your novels the central characters are always incomplete or damaged personalities. Do you believe that a character can be interesting without being damaged?

MMS: I don't believe that there's anyone alive who doesn't have some darkness to them. Something that they have to deal with all the time. That is often what draws us to people, and which makes them distinctive. Perfect faces are boring; likewise personalities.

CD: *Spares* is pretty graphic. Is there anything that you couldn't, or wouldn't, write?

MMS: I will write anything so long as it is making a worthwhile point. I have never yet done a sex scene, for example, and I will never do one unless it becomes relevant either to the character or to the development of the plot. Similarly, I'm not going to write in a sensationalist scene of either physical or psychological horror simply to prove I've got a bigger mental dick than anybody else.

CD: Are there any particular scary moments from books or film that stick in your mind?

MMS: The scariest thing that I've ever read in a book is in Stephen King's *Pet Sematary* when Gage dies, and you think, "I know what he's going to do, and it would be a really, really bad idea. Oh no, don't do that . . ." Films tend not to scare me that much. In fact, the most recent thing that did scare me was from an *X-Files* episode, believe it or not, from the first series where Scully's dad dies and she sees him in a dream. You can see his lips moving but not what he's saying. There was something about that I found really frightening. That's something that a lot of horror films forget: keep it simple. The first *Nightmare on Elm Street* is so effective because it has things like the long arms scraping along the wall and you're thinking, "Ooh, that's a proper dream thing. I don't like that at all." That's the stuff that works.

CD: Anne Sexton spoke of "writing myself sane". Do you feel any compulsion to exorcise?

MMS: Definitely. In some ways I started writing prose to do that. The first short stories were an attempt to have some cathartic effect, some influence, on a relationship which was finishing. I'm not sure of the degree to which it actually works. The idea behind "The Man Who Drew Cats" (winner of the British Fantasy Award for Best Short Story) was if something really bad happens to you then, if you can paint it, get it out of your body, you can walk away from it. To a degree that is true of writing, but it's no panacea.

CD: You had a demanding 1995 writing the first draft of the *Weaveworld* screenplay. Did this translate into a darker mood within *Spares*?

MMS: The two projects didn't really cross over. The *Weaveworld* gig was actually quite a fun process. They had me flown out to L.A. several times, which gave me the opportunity to buy nice salad dressings, and it was good to have a proper attempt at screenwriting. It was hard work but I need that. I need to have deadlines, I need to be pushed. Regarding *Spares*, I like dark stuff and believe that it needs to be explored sometimes.

CD: The film rights for *Spares*

have been optioned by Steven Spielberg in a million-dollar deal. I heard that Robert De Niro wanted to play the lead role.

MMS: Yeah, I heard that! Actually, four groups put bids in for it: DreamWorks, Hollywood Pictures, Robert DeNiro's production company Tribeca, and Mel Gibson's company. The last two got Universal and Paramount behind them to put in bids. My dream casting would be Mel Gibson or Jeff Bridges as Randall and Robert De Niro as Vinaldi. If anyone could talk them into it then that would be rather nice.

CD: Are there any reasons why *Spares* was set in America?

MMS: *Spares* needed to be set in America because of its subject matter. Certain types of stories are just not credible when set in England, which is one of the reasons why a lot of the big movies are set in the States. You can believe a small town being wiped off the map in the States, for example: in this country you'd see it on the news and *The Sun* [an infamous English tabloid newspaper] would be setting up an appeal. Conversely, there are certain types of stories that you can't set in the States, so it's good that people like Kim Newman and Nick Royle and a bunch of other people are insisting on setting their stuff here. Kim writes superb novels which have a real sense of England, and Nick is very strong on London, and Eastern Europe. Ramsey Campbell, of course, is stunning on the North of England — as is Mark Morris. Each to their own. I just feel more confident with the States.

CD: You recently submitted the first draft of your third novel, *One of Us*. Could you tell us what it's about?

MMS: It's a kind of a cross between *Only Forward* and *Spares*, in that it has a strong crime *noir* element, but it's also more freeform and imaginative in the way that *Only Forward* was. The basic themes are memory and dreams, and how they affect people's lives— and how they reflect the true nature of reality. It's set in the near future, around the year 2017, which was interesting to me because it meant that the characters who appear in it would also be living in our world now, which is the first direct connection my novel work has had with the current day.

CD: Are there events happening 'now' in our present that feature as memories in the story?

MMS: Well, the basic premise of the story concerns an organization called REMtemps. Hap Thompson has people's dreams for them, either nightmares or boring anxiety dreams that they don't want to have; these dreams are taken from them and put into his head: so he has a rough night's sleep but at least he gets paid for it. Then he's offered a completely illegal job—caretaking a memory. He discovers what's at the end of the memory and he realizes he's in big trouble, and then must try to find the person who dumped it on him and get it back into their head before all hell catches up with him . . .

CD: What was it about the song that inspired the title to *One of Us*?

MMS: I can't go into that too deeply because there are some revelations within the book. But if

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someone were to listen to the song then read the book they'll understand the connection.

CD: Something that we touched on before was whether you feel restricted with writing within a particular genre. It occurred to me that Joe Lansdale has made quite a success of writing both within and without as he sees fit.

MMS: Absolutely, and if you read the Hap and Leonard books: what genre are they? They're sort of crime in that they've got policemen in them and they're to do with illegal activities, but they're not crime in the standard sense. They're just literature. The simple answer is that the more I write the less discernible—or indeed important—genre boundaries seem to be.

CD: Is that because you feel more confident of your identity as a writer?

MMS: I still don't have any opinion on whether I'm writing stuff of value or not, because I can't really tell. It's down to the people who read it to make that decision. I hope I'm getting slightly better at what I do but that just comes with practice — and there's still a long long way to go. I've never been particularly interested in genre boundaries, and I'm becoming less interested in them now as people appear to accept the fact that the books are going to be fairly uncategorizable. So it's becoming less of a fight—though sometimes my publishers are a little wary, which is understandable.

CD: Joe is very well respected, he's won lots of awards, he sells lots of books —

MMS: The thing about Joe Lansdale is his voice. The genre he writes in doesn't make any difference. The reason why Joe is respected and liked is because he's got this extraordinary voice and can write the arse off it. [An English compliment!] So what genre he chooses to write in is largely irrelevant—and the same goes for most of the writers I really respect. I don't read Stephen King to be frightened—I read him because I love hearing his voice.

CD: Last year you were approached by the BBC to write a diary of the future for the panel discussion program, *Futurewatch*. Was it strange writing yourself as the main character?

MMS: Not really, because that's pretty much what I've done in all the novels. Obviously I'm not as tall as the characters in the novels, or as tough, and I'm much more sensitive, clearly. I'm really an all-round nice guy.

CD: The program touched upon some quite contentious and emotive issues — judging by some of the panel's arguments. Did you find any of this material grist for your writerly mill?

MMS: *Spares* is an anomaly in that I thought of the idea of cloning people as spare parts six or seven years ago, long before the current furor about cloning came up. When I started writing *Spares* there was no talk of Dolly the sheep. I didn't write it to be contentious, I just wrote it because it was the idea that most appealed to me at the time when I was writing a new novel. I'm more interested in writing satire on the current day than necessarily trying to prognosticate the future. The idea of cloning has been around for ages and there are loads of science fiction writers who have gone off and done every single permutation of that idea. I tend not to read any science fiction, because I don't want to be influenced by other peoples vision of the future, but in terms of prognostication fine minds have already had a crack at it and failed. I'm much more interested in talking about the current day through the prism of looking back from the future.

CD: Will you be devoting a fair amount of time to writing screenplays, principally adaptations of other people's books?

MMS: So far most of what I've done has been adaptations. My next project is an original screenplay. I'm pretty clear for the next three months. So what I want to do is write the screenplay. Like everybody else.

CD: You've said before, regarding screenwriting, that it can be a quite frustrating process doing all the work and there being external factors over which you have no control.

MMS: Yeah, which is one of the reasons why I want to write the screenplay alone. I'm not going to try to sell it on the basis of the treatment, I'm not going to try to get money from anybody for it until I've finished. That way you avoid having to cater to other people's views and having things mangled around and basically dancing to somebody else's tune. Whereas if I just write it and finish it and hand it in and say, "Okay, do you want to buy this or not?" If the answer's "no," then I shall either give it to somebody else or rewrite it to my own taste: just not get caught up in that Hol-

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lywood writer syndrome where you very quickly lose sight of why you wanted to write it in the first place.

CD: Given that your UK publisher only printed a small number of the hardcover of *Spares* to create that sense of desirability through scarcity, do you feel that the idea has merit to try to generate interest without actually providing significant quantities for the bookstores?

MMS: No. I don't think it works, and I think its very frustrating for the author. The hardback is the first time his or her new baby hits the stands, and you want to sell as many as fucking possible. You want positive feedback. I think the publisher wanted to sell all the hardcovers that they printed, and they were prepared to miss out on some sales in order to sell all their copies. As it happens, every single copy is now gone. You cannot get a UK hardback copy of *Spares*, even if you break into the publishers. They don't have any. It's history.

CD: Were you surprised about being approached to do a limited edition to *Spares*?

MMS: I was, yes, because a limited is something that has a great deal of cachet applied to it, and I was very flattered that someone would feel it was time to do that.

CD: Can you give us a fifteen-second sell on *Spares*?

MMS: It's brilliant!

CD: You've still got fourteen seconds left! So what's it about?

MMS: In the future wealthy people, when they have a child, will take out the ultimate life insurance for it. They will do that by creating a life and then systematically destroying it. It's a book about human clones who are used for spare parts, and the man who tries to save them. Its also about technology, and human nature: how they can go wrong, and what can be done to repair them.

CD: The limited edition of *Spares* includes the opening chapter, or prologue, that is missing from all previous editions. Having recently read it for the first time—and very much enjoyed it!—I am curious to know why it was not included. It sets the tone for the book extremely well but focuses the reader very much upon the spares as well as on Randall. Did you want to avoid this misdirection, given what follows, or was there another reason?

MMS: I actually like the first chapter a lot now, though there was a time when I didn't. There were two main reasons why I left it out of the mass market edition. The first is that I felt that there was already a lot of back story to contend with at the beginning of the book — some understanding of how Jack had got to where he was, the nature and purpose of the *Spares*, and so forth — and that the "front" story needed to get up and running as quickly as possible. The other reason is that I had gone over and over that first chapter a zillion times, when I was trying to work up the momentum to start chapter 2, and frankly I was sick to death of it. Every time I sat down and tried to write some new stuff I looked at the first chapter and thought "Oh Jesus, not that *again* . . ." Of course now it doesn't have that sense of doom attached to it, and I wonder whether it should have been included. Still, it's there in the limited, and anyone who liked the book enough to want the limited will get a better understanding of the way in which the book was really written. I'm really glad that it's getting a life in the end — otherwise it would have been a bit like a spare who wasn't pulled out of the tunnels. Plus it's got a security gate in it that I liked a lot, and may swipe for some subsequent book . . .

CD: The limited also features an introduction by Neil Gaiman. He is obviously a fan of your work, and I imagine you must be a fan of his. Would you ever consider a joint project with him or, indeed, with any writer?

MMS: Neil has been great: it's obviously extremely cool to have someone like him or Clive Barker, both of whose work I admire enormously, express nice sentiments about your work. I've never really done any joint prose work, but it's certainly something I might consider. I was lucky enough to work on the first draft of *Weaveworld*, of course, and Neil and I are actually in desultory conversation with Steve Jones about a possible film project. It's just a matter of time, and co-ordination, as always. Neil is one of the busiest men alive . . .

CD: You're a ten pack-a-minute smoker. Have you ever considered giving up smoking so that you can you drive yourself to produce a vehement, vitriolic broadside of a novel?

MMS: [Laughs] Well, smoking's a difficult subject. Having just come back from California where they are getting increasingly fucking insane on the subject . . .

CD: Sane or insane?

MMS: Insane. Although actually there's almost a backlash happening now, because smokers are clearly getting so stamped on. Two of the core elements of the American psyche are a desire to stand up for yourself and your rights (i.e. people shouldn't be allowed to smoke next to you), but also a desire not to be pushed around by anybody, especially the government. And it's got to the stage where even non-smokers are thinking, "Hang on, the government really is pushing them around a little here." There was one very nice restaurant in Santa Barbara where we were sitting out on the porch and we asked the waiter if we could smoke. He replied, "Absolutely sir, we are not afraid." [Laughs] It's pretty self evident that smoking is a stupid thing to do, and anyone who starts is an idiot but it's got to the stage where a lot of people are using it as a scapegoat for other problems. There is some stuff about this issue in *One of Us*, that if you'd just stop smoking everything would be lovely: we can eat all the burgers we want, we can drink all the beer we want, we can pump all the gas fumes into the world we want. Never mind that, if we could just stop people having a cigarette now and again everything would be fine. And it's completely missing the point, it's giving people easy choices to make, easy things to be cross about to distract from the much bigger issues about which they can't do anything. You can stop the next person from smoking but you can't stop yourself from being lazy or disappointing or having emotional problems. You see a lot of people getting hysterical about other people smoking as a protection mechanism for all those things that they can't do anything about. But kids, you still shouldn't start smoking.

CD: Is *One of Us* set in America?

MMS: Yes. It's set in Los Angeles, Florida and Ensenada.

CD: Do you think it's going to become your accepted milieu?

MMS: I feel happiest writing stuff set in America because a lot of the assumptions I make about culture and character are based around American people rather than English people. Especially as I grew up in America. However, at some stage, just for the hell of it, I may write a Nick Hornby-style London novel full of references to English 1970's children's programs and Blue Peter and all that, just to see if I could do it, quite apart from anything else. But that will be an intellectual game because I don't have anything to say about that kind of story set in this country.

CD: Do you feel that the American society and culture is a richer mine?

MMS: I think it's a far richer mine and I think America is a more interesting country: it's more interesting geographically, it's more interesting culturally, the cities and towns are much more appealing to me. Yeah, it's just a much richer environment to set stories in, or to live, as far as I'm concerned.

CD: One of the authors whom you most admire is Ray Bradbury, who wrote brilliantly about childhood. Given how we are now as a society, do you think we're unable to produce a writer who can write lovingly about one's youth?

MMS: We have become a much more cynical age. It would be very difficult to create a new Ray Bradbury, not least because he's a distinctive individual writer. Childhood in the forties/fifties was very different to a childhood in the seventies/eighties. It's a different time. It also depends on the country: I don't think England will ever produce a writer of childhood of Bradbury's type and calibre because, in England, there is a fear of sentiment and people, in general, tend to dismiss things that are sentimental. Americans tend to use the word "sentimental" in a different sense to us; in England we will use it pejoratively whereas Americans will use it in a positive sense. Of course that can overflow and become sickly saccharine in someone like Thomas Kincaid, who produces paintings that look like a chocolate box and everyone goes crazy over. But an ability, and a willingness, and an openness to write lovingly about childhood or emotions, so long as it doesn't get overdone and start curdling, is a very important part of a good book. And a constant flip, cynical attitude which a lot of English writers have is a spurious maturity, really.

CD: There have always been novels that focus on the future, or near future, and almost without exception they have done so negatively. How do you think that reflects upon our society?

MMS: I think it's to do with two things. Firstly, people's fear of change, and secondly, because a lot of the people who write science fiction books are writing for didactic purposes, so they can say "Oh, we shouldn't be doing this because if we do this it's all going

to be horrible." I feel very positive about the near future, and *One of Us* is quite a cheery book. Once again, it feels very dated and 1970's, to me, to say "Oh, the future's going to be a nightmare, it's all going to be horrible!" I think, "Not necessarily. Could be fun."

CD: The twentieth century will be noted for being one of great technological advancement, and from this perspective, things can only get better.

MMS: Well, things will become more complex, certainly. It's up to us to determine whether they become better. At the moment there are so many things that looked like they were going to remain science fiction for a long time — like cloning, genetic engineering, transgenic implants — suddenly looking as if they're going to happen by the end of the afternoon! One of the jobs of a writer in this time of high velocity is to say: just because we can do all these things, does it necessarily mean that we should do all these things? And examine worst case and best case scenarios and suggest routes for plotting between the two of them. To a degree, that's what *Spares* attempts to do with the issue of cloning. You don't have to look very far in life to see examples of human nature failing in the face of new technology, or in the face of cultural change in general. In fiction you can examine the possibilities before anyone really gets hurt.

CD: Do you feel that today's writers have got to be more aware of their moral standpoint with such issues?

MMS: I tend to distrust any writer who writes anything solely for one reason: to convince people about the rainforest, or get back at their ex-partner, or to make some point about anything in particular. It will end up being just a slogan. By all means it should have ideas at its core, but really you should be trying to tell people a story, a story that is a manifestation of that idea, rather than just trying to prop up the fact that basically you've just got one point that you really want to bellow at people.

CD: Was there a subconscious message within your first two novels about how one could repair and heal oneself?

MMS: I think it's as important that someone read the book and say, "That was a bloody good story, I really enjoyed reading that. I laughed," and will do as much good as someone saying, "On page 252 there was quite a good way of dealing with the fact that one's ex-partner screwed you around." If you can get both things, great. Bringing a good and positive and interesting and changing experience into someone's life is more important than lecturing them.

CD: Is it more important to you that the reader enjoy your book than they take something positive from it?

MMS: I don't think the two are inconsistent: some people will enjoy a book because it makes them laugh, some people enjoy a book because it reminds them of an experience that they had, or reinforces an opinion that they have, or because it truly changes their outlook on life. A good book will do all of the above.

CD: At the end of the day, are you writing primarily for your own edification?

MMS: I'm writing because it's the only thing I can do, and the only thing I want to do. Within that, I hope to write books that other people will enjoy. I enjoy writing, and I don't have any bigger agenda than that, really. Which is probably very unimaginative of me, I dislike creative people who think their "creativity" somehow marks them out as special. It's a job, a way of spending a life. By all means be a painter, but don't go parading around the place wearing a fucking beret. It's just being an asshole. Ditto with writing, ditto with anything.

CD: One should see the worth in one's work but not in oneself.

MMS: Yes, because it's a very lucky way of being able to spend your life: to be able to make stuff up and write it down and have people take an interest in it and give you money for doing it. I think you should show humility in the face of that, rather than expecting additional credit. You've already been a lucky bastard — don't push it.

CD: In closing, I feel I must ask the most important question: Are you some kind of sicko, or what?

MMS: No. I'm lovely, and always make sure the bodies are buried neatly.

CD: What would you have engraved on "your" headstone!?

MMS: "Can I have my money now, please?"

— CD —

A Conversation with DAVID MORRELL

by Mark Graham

{Please note: words and phrases I have inserted to make the narrative flow or to assist in the reader's understanding are set off in brackets. Ellipses are used to set off remarks made by David Morrell in a parenthetical fashion.}

Since 1977 I have reviewed more than a dozen of David Morrell's books in the *Rocky Mountain News* and other publications. In the Winter 1995 edition, *Cemetery Dance* published an extensive interview I had done with David a year earlier on the subject of the simultaneous publications of *Assumed Identity* and *The Totem (Complete and Unaltered)*.

While Morrell is a self-proclaimed "thriller writer," his shorter works could most often be classified as horror, occasionally of the supernatural variety. He has twice won Bram Stoker Awards given by the Horror Writers Association for best novelette: in 1989 for "Orange Is for Anguish, Blue for Insanity" and in 1992 for "The Beautiful Uncut Hair of Graves." Two other novelettes were nominated for the same award as were two novelettes for World Fantasy awards. His short fiction was featured in the second anthology of Dark Harvest's landmark *Night Visions* series. He readily admits that the qualities of graphic horror spill over into his thriller novels, and the tension of the thrillers is an integral part of the horror stories.

Last fall saw the publication of another supernatural novelette in Doug Winter's excellent anthology, *Revelations* [*Millenium* in England]. In "If I Should Die Before I Wake," Morrell ties a ghost story reminiscent of Faulkner's "A Rose for Emily" with the true-life horrors of the 1918 flu epidemic.

In May, Warner published *Double Image*, a novel it took the author two years to write, and, in the same month, Subterranean Press published a chapbook which combines two unpublished prologues to Morrell's second novel, *Testament*, with significant autobiographical material. A new short story,,"Front Man," will be included in an Otto Penzler mystery anthology, *Murder for Revenge*, later this year. Although final details have not been worked out, the possibility exists that a trade paperback collection of short stories will come out within a year or so.

David shared his thoughts on all of these areas in a recent conversation.

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Although *Double Image* is a "thriller," it is significantly different from his other works, and the protagonist is definitely not a Rambo clone. I asked David if there was a conscious effort to make his main character more sensitive and less of a super hero than his trademark from *First Blood*, almost an "anti-Rambo."

"There was. I've been writing thrillers for over 25 years, and it has been my goal to change, to try to evolve, to progress and have one thing lead me to something else and to go in directions I haven't tried before. I have noticed my earlier books deal with [characters] such as Rambo from the special forces or the master scout in *Last Reveille* or the policeman in *Totem* or, you know, I've dealt with body guards; I've dealt with people with the CIA and other professionals in the life-and-death thing.

"At the same time, if we go back and look at the hero of *Testament*, who was a writer; the hero of *Blood Oath*, who was a writer; and the hero of *Desperate Measures*, who was an obituary writer, there's an interesting contrast. I

guess, every once in a while, I'm going in the opposite direction.

"In *Double Image* I said to myself, All right, now I want to do a novel about a photographer. Well, if you're in the thriller-writing business, how is your photographer going to be able to handle himself in certain kinds of exciting death-threatening moments? So, early in the process, I realized that he had to have been a war photographer. He had to have been in experiences that involved shooting and explosions and death, which didn't necessarily make him as good as, say, a soldier in the same circumstances would be, but, at least, he wasn't going to flinch when the same kinds of threats came at him in his private life.

"My editor, Mel Parker at Warner Books, has been kidding me lately, because I have been getting into heroes that are often artistic, and, because of their artistry, certain nerves have been exposed. There is more of an emotional involvement from, as he put it, 'the dark side of the artist.' And, in fact, the new book I am working on moves farther in that direction yet, and I think maybe that's as far as I want to take it. And then I'll go in another direction. It's interesting to take people of artistic temperament and put them in life-threatening situations which make them go against their sensitivities."

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I was curious to know what made David decide to write about a photographer. Where did the inspiration for the book come from?

"It comes out of my interest in photographs. I began to realize that, in a lot of my novels, photographs were being featured in ways that suggested I had a subconscious interest in them.

"In *Testament*, for example, there's a scene where our hero is up on a bluff. He's just entered a ghost town, and he's found a photograph from the 1800's that was taken up on the bluff above the ghost town, and so, he goes up there with the photograph, and he is trying to align the photograph. So he's standing where he would, if he were the photographer, have been standing 100 years earlier. And then, as soon as he gets it all lined up, he begins to notice a peculiarity in the photograph, as if

someone is in its shadows, threatening the photographer a hundred years ago. Nothing further is done with the device, but there's a very eerie quality to the scene.

"I've done something like that a couple of times since then; for instance, in *Desperate Measures*, when our hero has broken into a prep school. He's looking at old yearbooks, and looking at the faces of children who went to school there in the '20's, and he's preoccupied because his son has died from cancer. He's looking at all these young men, and he's thinking to himself, Most of these guys are dead; I'm looking at dead men. And yet, in a way, they're not dead; they're frozen in time [This expression is used several times in *Double Image*].

"Anyhow, this got to work on my mind enough that I thought maybe it was time to do a book in which photography would have the center stage, in which the kind of preoccupation I had been hinting at briefly in previous books would explode fully, and therein lay a whole other problem because I realized that I knew nothing about photography, except that I was interested in it.

"The consequence was that this book took two years to write, because, gosh, I would say a year of the process involved the research I had to do. In my customary fashion I read every book I could get my hands on about the subject. Then I began taking courses, and then I bought myself a really good 35 millimeter camera, and then I began trying to figure the types of photographs I would take. And I've taken a few not-too-bad shots that I thought would be good enough to turn into 8 X 10s. But what I learned from the experience was how really really hard it is to take the kind of photographs we all recognize as being brilliant."

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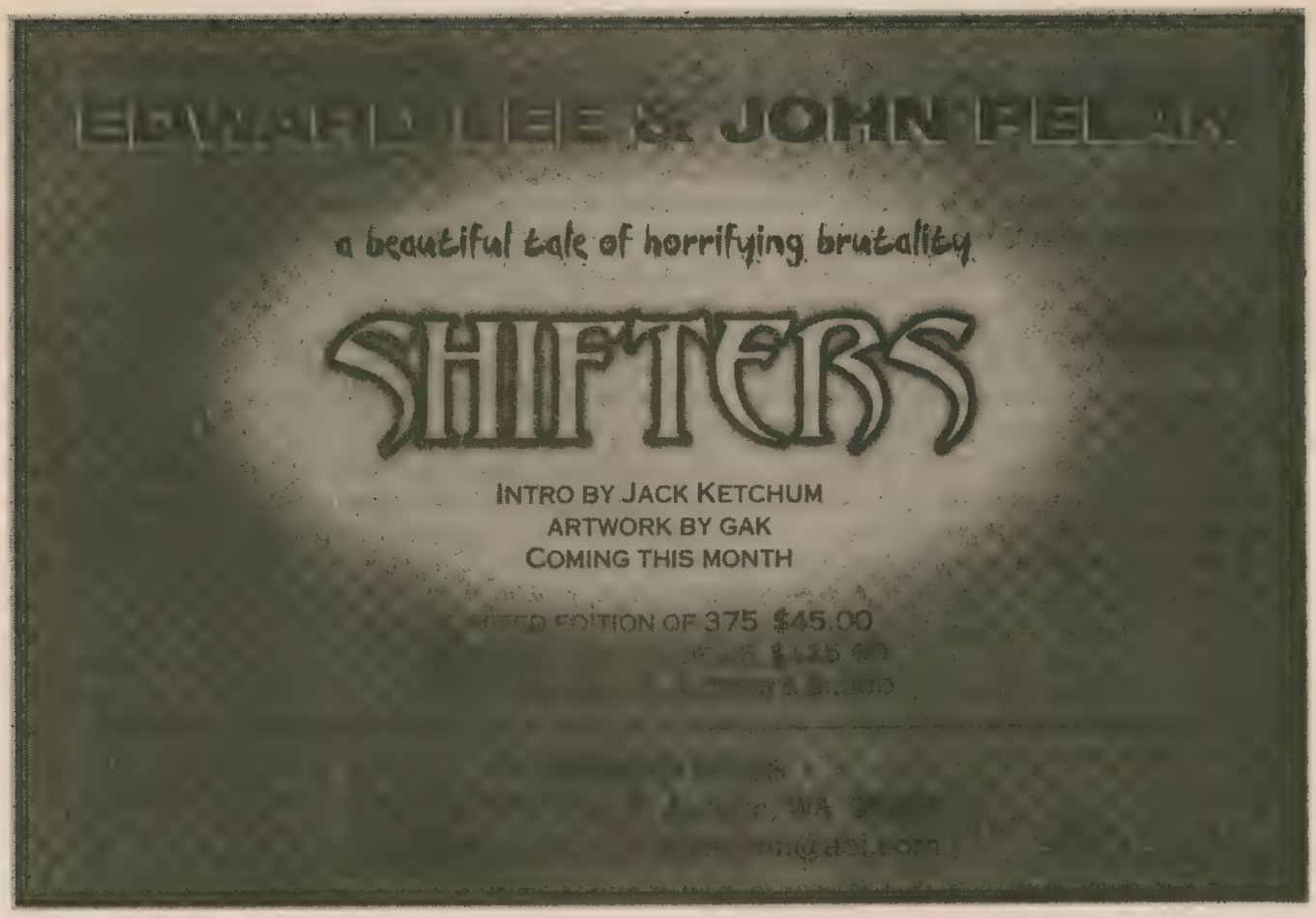
The first book by David Morrell I reviewed was *Last Reveille*. I recalled a conversation we had two decades ago when David said that he used extremely short chapters in that novel to suggest a photo album, each chapter representing a sepia-toned photograph. *Double Image* is 12 chapters long, but each of those chapters is divided into many mini-chapters, giving the book, in effect, 190 chapters, most only one to three pages long. I asked if he was trying for the same effect in



the current novel.

After a compliment on my memory [I'll take all of those I can get these days when short-term memory is driving me crazy], David explained his purpose:

"That's very interesting. I've completely forgotten about it. The chapters in *Last Reveille* were intended to be like sepia-tinted snapshots. And often I was using, in more ways than I normally do, participial constructions in the sentences to get a kind of frozen timeless-like quality.

"This is somewhat true in *Double Image*, except that I wasn't using that participial device I used in *Last Reveille*. I guess you could say that those short chapters are like dramatic snap shots, except snap shot implies a kind of stasis, and, obviously, what I'm always trying to do in my stories is to get the reader moving through the narrative. Stasis and narrative don't normally go together. It's a paradox to try to get a photographic effect while, at the same, keeping everything moving. I've been using this device for so long that it's become instinctive for me."

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Most of Morrell's novels start with a prologue, which either sets up the action or informs the reader about information that he will need later in the story. Although *Double Image* doesn't have a prologue *per se*, the opening sequence, and even the first half of the book, almost operate that way. In fact, there are several climaxes. I asked David to comment on the structure of the novel.

"This was a terrifically hard book to plot because I was dealing with two separate narratives within the present time: the plot involving a Bosnian war criminal and a plot involving a man who falls in love with a woman in a photograph that was taken in 1933. At the same time, I was dealing with a double narrative in another fashion, because there is a story in the past that is being replicated in the present. So one could say that there are four separate plots, all being woven through the novel, and I did not want the reader to feel, in any way, congested with regard to these four narrative forces as they were working themselves.

"This is easily the most com-

plicated story I have ever done, but I wanted to do it so it looked very, very simple. The original draft was almost 900 pages in manuscript, and, with one device and another, it was trimmed down to just a little bit over 600 pages, which gives you an idea of what else was in the story. The narrative was so rich, and there were so many subplots, that the reader might have had trouble encompassing it all. So, I did some trimming and cutting in order to get the story into what I hoped was a neat shape.

"Just to give you one example, the elderly photographer, Randolph Packard: There was a back-story involving him and the deaths of his parents. His father killed his mother and then himself on board a yacht in front of the young boy, who went into traumatic shock because of this. In order to hide what had happened, the boy poured fuel oil all over the yacht, set fire to it, got into a lifeboat, and floated away. The killings paralleled what had happened to the main character's father and mother. As soon as he told the old photographer what his youth had been like, the old photographer bonded with him in a way that was almost mysterious until we found out that they both had similar pasts. But that subplot got in the way of the larger story, and I had to cut it. There were many instances of that."

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Recently I read Dean Koontz's new book, *Fear Nothing*, and I noticed that there were music references all through the narrative. There is a similarity in *Double Image*; in fact, there could easily be a soundtrack to the novel, which would include the different songs, artists and classical pieces that were mentioned. David had several reasons for using this music.

"Dean is exemplary in the way he uses evocative details. In contrast, sometimes writers rely too much on the sense of sight when they are describing. I make it a habit to do what I call triangulation, which is trying to get two or three senses involved in any given scene, so the reader doesn't rely so heavily on sight. If you can involve sound and taste and touch, it makes the scene fuller. So I used music. But how do you describe music? It's very hard. Often, by referring to it, you are asking the reader to bring memories from the reader's own experience. If I mention Bobby Darin, most people know what Bobby Darin sang like, and, so, they help me with the book. They add details I could never possibly describe. Similarly, with the Miles Davis reference, anybody who knows the classical jazz album, *Kind of Blue*, would immediately put it into the scene."

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Is Bobby Darin a particular favorite?

"I am a Bobby Darin fan. I'm fascinated by singers and actors and writers who are unique and brilliant at what they do and yet are repulsive in their private lives. Bobby Darin, Steve McQueen, and Ernest Hemingway are good examples, although Hemingway was less repulsive than the other two. McQueen would have to be at the top of the all-time monstrous people I've ever heard about in the arts. Below that Darin—he had been given a medical death sentence when he was young because he had a weak heart. The doctor had said he wouldn't live to be 25. And Darin, desperate to be a performer, saw the timeline in his life to be so short that he ruthlessly pursued his career at the expense of the people around him because he was trying to buy time. As it turned out, he lived to be older than that. But the details of the way he treated people in his private life are shocking in their callousness."

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I noted that there is a lot of jazz in the book, and the protagonist's name is Mitch Coltrane. Did the name come from the noted jazz musician, John Coltrane?

"It did, yes. I always want names that have overtones. You take a name like Coltrane, and you're hearing, I hope, some of the darker blues passages you find in classic jazz.

"I often write to music. A lot of my earlier books were written to Verdi's operas. In this case I was playing Jerry Goldsmith's music from *Basic Instinct* and Bernard Herrmann's from *Vertigo*. I wanted that kind of obsessive disturbing sexual overtone that the music in those films created. I was thinking of this novel, in fact, as a combination of the things that *Vertigo* and *Basic Instinct* did in the movies."

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Mitch Coltrane is much different from Morrell's previous heroes. He is an artist first, a thriller hero second. I wondered if David identified with him more than the other characters he has created.

"At the time I did. I always do when I'm writing. In fact, I identify with my main characters almost the way a method actor would. It can, under certain circumstances, be harrowing because I share a lot of their anguish. In this case, Mitch Coltrane had a terrible youth. My own youth wasn't the best. When I wrote about him wrestling with the

ghosts of his childhood, a lot of my own personal nightmares kept coming back.

"What I most identify with, however, is his compulsion to be a photographer. Some books change an author's life. In this case I came out of the novel with a new way of seeing. I now spend many of my evenings reading about photography. When I'm in a new city, I immediately start finding photography galleries, so I can look at the pictures there. In Santa Fe, where I live, there are photography galleries that I can't stay away from. It's become a full part of my life. Now, when I look around at the things I see every day, I begin unconsciously framing them as if they are in a composition for a photograph. It makes me see things more and see them better than I did before."

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In his last two novels [*Extreme Denial* and *Double Image*] the houses that the protagonists live in have such importance that the settings and architecture almost control the books. I asked David to discuss this.

"Every year or so, *Architectural Digest* does an issue devoted to the homes of celebrities, and often these homes belonged to celebrities who have died.

"Back in '94, I picked up one of these because someone had told me that the Steve McQueen house was in it. But when I started flipping through the magazine, a lot of other houses caught my attention. One, in particular, had been built in Los Angeles in the late '20's for an actor named Ramon Navarro. My jaw dropped. I couldn't believe how beautiful and distinctive and unusual the thing was.

"It had been designed by Lloyd Wright, the son of Frank Lloyd Wright. The magazine had photographs of what the house looked like before that subdivision in Los Angeles had other houses around it and the trees grew up and all of that. I became fixated on that house. In fact, in the novel, I put the same furniture in the house. The layout is virtually the same.

"One afternoon when I was in Los Angeles on a publicity tour for *Extreme Denial*, I went in search of the house. I had a camera with me, and I suddenly realized that I was doing what the hero of *Double Image* does. I tried to stand in those places where the original photographer had stood in the late '20's, but now there were other houses around it, and shrubs and trees had grown up, and it was like an entirely different place except that, miraculously, the house looked the same. The house, by the way, is on the National Historical Register. Back then, two years ago, it was owned by Diane Keaton.

"What I didn't know is that, while I was walking up and down the street taking pictures and just admiring this beautiful unique house, which is a cross between a Mayan temple and a medieval castle, the place was for sale, but there was no "for sale" sign outside. Had I known, I would have called the realtor and explained what I was up to and perhaps have been allowed inside. So I missed my chance, and I haven't been back since."

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In *Double Image* Mitch falls in love with the house and buys it. I asked David [in jest—this is a multi-million dollar house after all] why he didn't buy its model so he could have a place when he was visiting Los Angeles.

"A compulsion should only go so far," he laughed. "But it was quite an experience to see the house in person. If I say so, my own photographs didn't turn out so badly, but not in a league with *Architectural Digest*. But that's what happens to me. I become fascinated by something, and then I ask myself, Why am I fascinated by this? And that, in turn, gets me looking deep into my psyche. The next thing I know, I'm spinning a plot that comes out of personal nightmares I'm still trying to work out.

"That reminds me of another origin to this story. My interest in opera is such that I used to subscribe to the *Opera News*. There was an article that I saved—about a student at a musical school who had lived in a house near the campus and who had been cleaning out the basement of a house that he rented. He found scrapbooks about an opera singer he had never heard of who had lived in the '20's. He became so fascinated with her that he set out on a quest to find out who she was. It turned out that she had lived in the house he was renting and that she had been a teacher at the school before she died. And I got to thinking, What a wonderful device–the idea of descending into the past and the compulsion of the past leading you to find out something in the present.

"Naturally, you can see how this works in *Double Image*, where our hero, having moved into the house that the old photographer owned, finds photographs that lead him on a quest to find out what happened to a woman who lived there in 1933. It's not like I was lifting from that article, because I go in an alternate direction. And yet, there's something about the quest that I never would have thought of if I hadn't read that piece in *Opera News*."

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While *Double Image* could not be classed as a supernatural horror novel, there are, nevertheless, at least a couple of scenes that could be considered horror, and one definite instance of the supernatural. I asked David what he thought.

"I don't think I am ever capable of eliminating the horrific entirely from what I write: no matter what genre I'm working in, from historical westerns like *Last Reveille* to the thriller genre to *The Totem* [considered by many the best werewolf novel of the twentieth century], which, of course, is an out-and-out horror novel, although not what I'd call supernatural. Because the mood of *Double Image* is very dark, I found myself becoming interested in Gothic elements that were creeping in. There is no overt supernatural quality, but if someone were to say to me, 'Hey, this is a horror novel,' I would not object. Some of the qualities of the tone are typical of dark fantasy. And lots of the set-ups hearken to other kinds of stories in, say, a horror set-up, or even in fantasy. There's a movie called *Portrait of Jenny*, which I'm very fond of, which is about an artist's involvement with the ghost of a woman who died when a tidal wave hit a New England lighthouse. The original novel was written by Robert Nathan. It is, finally, optimistic, but I found it, at the same time, dark and eerie because, although the hero doesn't know it, he is obsessed with someone who is dead. Ultimately, that is what happens in *Double Image*. Basically, my hero is committing necrophilia. *Laura* (an Otto Preminger film) would be another example. In that one, a police detective investigating a woman's murder interviews people about her, reads her letters, spends long hours staring at her portrait over the mantle, and, finally, falls in love with her."

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I thought it an interesting coincidence considering David's fascination with *Portrait of Jenny* that the heroine in *Double Image* is named Jennifer. She was something of an enigma for me. We had discussed the evolution of his treatment of women in his novels during a recent conversation, and it seems, with each new novel, the female protagonists have grown stronger. Jennifer's dependence on Mitch Coltrane, and her willingness to come back to him again and again, appeared to me to be a step backward. David understood where I was coming from, but he hadn't realized what had happened when he had to cut large chunks out of the manuscript.

"This is an interesting thing about trimming the novel. Some of the back-stories were lost. I told you about the older photographer whose back-story was cut. Jennifer alludes to her past very briefly early in the story. She was married to a guy who only married her so he could have a base from which he could go out and seduce other women and use his marriage as an excuse not to get seriously involved with them. There was a considerable amount of material in the 900-page version in which the consequence of Jennifer's failed marriage was that she became insecure and possessive in her relationships with other men.

"She was so determined to keep her relationship with Mitch that he finally had to break it off because she was showing up everywhere he went: his exercise club, the neighborhood coffee shop, etc. Some men have done the same thing in their relationships with women, but in this case, it happened to be a female character who was so fixated on our hero that she was smothering him.

"As I began trimming and trimming and trying to tie the four plots together, the other tangents were suddenly getting in the road. So, a lot of the material about Jennifer has been eliminated. I felt that the remaining references to her background were strong enough that the cuts wouldn't be noticed. But, perhaps for you, those elements were still needed in order to explain why she kept coming back to the hero.

"I'm reminded of James Cameron's *Aliens*, where, in the movie that was shown in the theaters, the heroine, Ripley, seemingly out of nowhere, develops a fixation on a little girl that she finds on the asteroid. But, in a version that's available on laser disc, fifteen minutes have been added. When Ripley wakes up from suspended animation, we discover that she had a daughter who grew up, had a life, and died while Ripley was away. In Ripley's mind, her daughter is still alive, but, in fact, a whole lifetime has gone by. So, when Ripley sees the little girl on the asteroid, she transposes all her maternal instincts toward this child, and later, when Ripley and the alien queen fight, the essence of the scene is that they are two mothers defending their children. This longer version of *Aliens* has a richer texture, and yet it also makes an already long movie have a somewhat sprawled structure. I certainly don't mean to compare myself to Cameron, but this illustrates the inherent problem when you have to trim a work."

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I also was curious about Mitch's relationship with the other woman in his life. After he becomes obsessed with the house he

buys, he becomes obsessed with the actress who used to live there. Later he discovers that the actress's granddaughter, Tash Adler, looks enough like her to be a doppelganger. Thus, Mitch's obsession transfers to the younger woman. They have a scene when they witness an elusive flash of light at sunset that seems to symbolize their devotion to each other. But, soon after that, we discover that Tash Adler is a better actress than her grandmother ever was, and that she is bent on destroying Mitch and any other man who gets near her. David's explanation touched on many aspects of the novel.

"I think it's important to remember that we never see the scene from Tash's point of view. For all we know, she was lying to him, and she never saw anything. She's the dark side of Jennifer. Jennifer has one relationship with men, and Tash Adler has another. And both of them are unhealthy. Tash will tell you anything, will do anything, in order to put you in her power.

"The book was deliberately set up to be a series of fake-outs on the reader. The character of Dragan Ilkovic is a monstrous villain, who is the antagonist in one of the best action sequences I've ever written—a 50-page hunt in a valley that was burned out by a fire. But that action scene ends about a third of the way into the book with the villain dying. Someone reading this book will say, 'Well, wait a minute; I thought this was a book about a Bosnian war criminal. Where is this book going now?'

"That's the reaction I want. My intention was to write a book that had a structure like Hitchcock's *Psycho*. You think you're involved in a movie about Janet Leigh absconding with money that she's stolen from her boss. And, instead, she goes to a motel where she's killed by Tony Perkins in the shower. It's amazing how long into the movie Hitchcock switches plots—almost thirty minutes. You think you are in one kind of plot, a woman-escapes-from-the-law story. All of a sudden, a third of the way in, she's killed. You say, 'Wait a minute. The heroine is dead. What on earth is this film about?' And then all of the rules are gone. From that moment, we're adrift. We don't have any narrative bearings. Anything can happen at any time. That's the source of the terror in that story.

"I wanted to do the same kind of thing. There are four different places in *Double Image* where the narrative changes, where the reader thinks it's one kind of a story, and all of a sudden it switches, and then it switches again, and it is really not until about 40 pages from the end that we finally find out what the truth of the narrative is.

"So, I saw the scene where they are looking at the green flash as one of those switches. [The flash is a phenomenon in which, as the sun sets and disappears below the horizon, there is supposed to be a trick of light that occurs; a flash briefly illuminates the sky.] From Mitch's point of view, it's a mystical moment in which he and Tash Adler see something spectacular and are bonded. But we never see things from Tash's point of view. Maybe she saw it, and maybe she didn't; maybe she's lying. But only later does the reader understand that he or she has been tricked as much as Mitch has. Like so many scenes in the book, this one is not what it seems. Twist, twist, twist—basically that's what I was trying to do."

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Speaking of the hero's two love interests in the book, I commented that there is probably more graphic sex in this novel than in all of David's previous books put together. After laughing and agreeing, he talked about the sexual aspect of *Double Image*.

"I wanted to write a book about sexual obsession, and I decided, finally, that I had to be more graphic and more frequent in the sex scenes and have them go on at greater length than I had before. Sex scenes should not be in a novel if they don't have a narrative function. Usually, in past novels, where I had a sex scene, it was down played and didn't take too long. The scenes were symbolic, showing that the hero's relationship with the heroine was serious.

"In my previous novel, *Extreme Denial*, however, the hero was so in love with the heroine that he was determined to go to enormous lengths to prove his love for her. In that case, I had a sex scene that went on a little longer than usual because I needed to establish the depth of the man's feeling for this woman.

"But, by the time we reach *Double Image*, we're into different territory. We're talking about a man who is so obsessed with a woman on every level that we need to really understand the level of sexuality that's involved. And, probably, I won't be doing that again. I can absolutely justify every sex scene in the book. I don't want to get into the Harold Robbins school of writing where you just throw in a sex scene because you can't think of anything else. Sex scenes need to have a narrative function, and, in this book, they sure do."

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It has been a long time since any of David's books have been

made into movies. In addition to the three Rambo films, I remember watching the mini-series of *Brotherhood of the Rose* which followed one of the Denver Broncos' abortive Super Bowl performances and helped to make that evening less painful for a Bronco fan like me. And, since the Broncos finally won the big one this year, I figured it was about time for another Morrell movie. I asked if anything was happening.

"A few things. Last year, Showtime's TV series *The Hunger* (a sexual horror series that takes its tone from the film adaptation of Whitley Streiber's novel of the same name) did a version of my short story, 'But at My Back I Always Hear.' Also, *Extreme Denial* was sold to the movies a couple of years ago. As happens so often, it may get trapped in development hell. You mentioned Rambo. The company that had the rights to make the Rambo films was called Carolco. It was successful in the '80's, making films like *Terminator 2*, *Total Recall*, and *Basic Instinct*. But it had other movies that didn't do as well, and ultimately it went into bankruptcy. The rights to make future Rambo movies were sold to Miramax. This might sound like an odd choice because Miramax is known for art films, but Miramax also has a division called Dimension, which makes genre pictures. They did a really wonderful horror movie called *Mimic* last year, which had Mira Sorvino in it and was directed by Guillermo del Toro, who also directed a very successful and interesting Mexican horror movie called *Cronos*. So we'll see what happens with Rambo at his new home."

•

I was really blown away by Doug Winter's new anthology, *Revelations* [for which Cemetery Dance did the limited edition, a wonderful book, and I'm not just saying that to schmooze the editor]. In addition to David's masterful ghost story, Joe Lansdale has one of the best stories he has written, and Clive Barker's wraparound stories are unique in the genre. I asked David for some comments and background on what I consider the best anthology of the '90's.

"*Prime Evil* [Winter's 1989 anthology] has an awfully good reputation, and so I think it was only logical that he would try to do it again. Originally the new anthology was called *Millenium*. But then the Chris Carter series, *Millenium*, came on TV, and *Millenium* was no longer a fresh title, so *Revelations* was substituted. It's my understanding *Millenium* is the title that's being used by the British publisher.

"Anyhow, Doug's notion was to have a writer do a story for each decade of the twentieth century, and we had certain instructions. One was that each story had to have an apocalyptic feel. Another was that, if possible, it had to end looking ahead and imply some of the things that would happen later in the century. I never read any of the other stories before the book was published, and I'm not sure anyone else did either. We knew there was going to be a wraparound by Clive Barker, something at the beginning and the end. The trick was who was going to do each decade.

"Some decades were already spoken for, so by process of elimination, I found myself looking at the teens, and, of course, the obvious thing in that decade is the First World War.

"As it turns out, one of my absolute favorite World War I stories is by a writer I admire greatly, Dan Simmons. This is a story in a collection called *Lovedeath*, an extraordinary work [a novella called 'The Great Lover,' for my money, one of the best short novels ever written—MG], and there was no way I was going to try to compete with Dan Simmons.

"All of a sudden, it hit me how apocalyptic, perhaps more so, was the 1918 flu epidemic. As soon as that thought came to me, I just threw myself into it. I couldn't wait. I wanted to deal with the fact that communication would not have been as simple as it is now, and medical tactics wouldn't have been as sophisticated, and diagnostics—even trying to isolate microbes—would not have been at all what we're used to.

"There are a number of ways you could do the story. You could set it in a major city. But I thought it might be more interesting if this were isolated in a small town. We have a doctor who finds a case of something he doesn't quite understand, and it spreads, and he still doesn't understand it, and he knows he's dealing with something that's pretty bad, but he doesn't really have a handle on it. It turns out he's a ham radio operator. As he is fighting whatever is happening in his town, he finds out what is happening in other parts of the country, and he begins to understand the awesome scope of what he's involved in, because what's happening in this little town is also happening in the rest of the country and the world. I think this was the only way, in a small space, to get a sense of the epochal nature of this plague.

"I did it in a kind of documentary style. With something this overpowering, you can choose to become very emotional in the way you handle it. But I thought the statistics were so enormous that, as I learned about these things, how many people died on a given day in New York City, for ex-

ample, my jaw would drop. And I thought maybe the raw fact of the matter could be such that, if I presented it in a documentary fashion, the reader's jaw would drop as mine had.

"Basically, I was trying to use understatement in writing the piece and slowly crank it up until about three fourths of the way through the story, we realize how horrific it was personally for the doctor. Then, at the very end, he is being visited by a ghost, and Dutch Elm disease is destroying all the trees in the town, and, as he looks dismally out the window, I wanted to hint that he's thinking. If this happened, what worse things might be waiting for us. I wanted to anticipate the AIDS epidemic and things farther down the line in the twentieth century that, ultimately, might make the flu epidemic of 1918 seem small."

•

David and I have frequently discussed his penchant for using supernatural elements in his short fiction, while avoiding them in his longer works. I asked if he could explain why the novels lack these weird touches.

"I have become, as a novel writer, associated by a large amount of the reading public with a certain kind of thriller, and I try to stretch the boundaries of that and insert elements of the other kinds of narratives I like, especially horror. But, ultimately, you can't push certain elements too far without beginning to be a writer that people say they don't understand anymore. So I have found that, in a way, I have to compartmentalize myself. In the short fiction I'm able to practice my love of horror narrative, most of which is non-supernatural, and, on occasion, introduce elements of the thriller. And then the reverse occurs in the novels. It may be, one of these days, I'll turn around and do another horror novel, but, at the moment, most of the ideas for horror narratives tend to lend themselves to manuscripts that run about 60 pages, so I guess my mind's trying to tell me something."

•

David mentioned that his next short story is a mystery to be published in an anthology, and that this story is particularly important to him because of its association with the man he feels influenced him most in his formative years as a writer. Here he discusses that story and that relationship.

"I have a story, 'Front Man,' coming out in an Otto Penzler anthology called *Murder for Revenge*, which Delacorte is doing. And it's a story that is very important to me because it is modeled loosely on the man who made me want to become a writer in the first place, the screenwriter Stirling Silliphant.

"I dedicated *Double Image* to him. Stirling—God bless him—died from prostate cancer in 1996. I felt a black hole envelop me when I heard that. I loved the man so much. He was such an influence on me and such a fine writer. He had been living in Bangkok. He had a Beverly Hills garage sale, sold everything he owned, and he went to Bangkok. He told me, 'David, in one of my former lives, I was living in Thailand, and I am going back there.'

"Because of *Route 66*, the television series that debuted in 1960 on CBS, I became a writer. Then I got to paying attention to the fact that Stirling had written so many of the episodes. So I wrote to him—I was very young at the time—and he gave me advice about being persistent. 'If you're meant to be a writer,' he said, 'just keep writing and, one day, you'll make it.' So that's what I did. I just followed his advice; I wrote and wrote and wrote.

"And then one day, when *First Blood* was finished, I sent him a copy after it was published, and, by God, he phoned me. We began to establish a personal relationship. In a case of things coming full circle, he was the executive producer of the miniseries based on my novel, *Brotherhood of the Rose*. Anyhow, just before he moved to Bangkok—he would have been perhaps 68 at the time—he said that television jobs were no longer as available to him because people were beginning to assume he was no longer in touch with the culture. He began to have to go around to networks and actually interview for jobs that before they would have been desperate to get him for. His agent would say, 'Stirling, they want you to bring a list of your credits to these interviews.' Then the agent would pause and say, 'But, Stirling, don't take a list of all of your credits because they won't believe that anybody could ever have written that much.' Stirling was really very prolific. He wrote 89 of the 116 episodes of *Route 66*; most of the half-hour episodes of *Naked City*; his Oscar-winning adaptation of John Ball's novel, *In the Heat of the Night*; my favorite disaster movie, *The Towering Inferno*; a charming adaptation of Daniel Keyes's 'Flowers for Algernon,' called *Charly*, for which Cliff Robertson won an Oscar; and a lot of other stuff.

"The point of the story in the anthology is about a screenwriter who is having trouble getting work because of aging. He decides to make a bargain with a devil of sorts by hiring a young man who wants to be a writer and getting this young man to pretend that he

has written the things the older screenwriter has written. The younger screenwriter is the front man, and the story has to do with the relationship between the young man and the old man and the difference between wanting to be a success and having the discipline to achieve success. The younger screenwriter actually begins to convince himself that he has written these scripts, and the conflict that develops between them is what the story is about. It's not a horror story by any means, but it's a story that is very important to me because it's about Stirling Silliphant and the influence he had on me."

•

Also, to be released this year is a chapbook that David has been planning on releasing for years. The book, published by Subterranean Press, ties together two prologues that were cut from his second, and, some think, his tightest novel, *Testament*. David seemed very excited about this project. He explains in the "Introduction" to the chapbook that he has been asked many times which book was most enjoyable to write and admits he doesn't have a ready answer: "But if anyone asks me which novel gave me the most trouble, I respond automatically: *Testament*."

After the success of *First Blood*, it took David three years to complete his second novel. He discusses the many reasons this was so, from the numerous revisions to the changes of point of view to the anguish that came with giving the children in the tale the names of his own children and then watching these characters die. I asked him how he came to the decision to publish these lost writings now.

"I have been sent a lot of chapbooks from various small presses, and most have not impressed me. I felt like the ones I saw from Subterranean and those from Roadkill Press in Colorado were the best I'd seen, so I agreed to publish this with Subterranean. When I moved here to Santa Fe, I found two prologues to *Testament* that I forgot I had written. One of them is in first person; the other is in third person. The third person one is almost a complete narrative. It's almost a story. And I wrote a long autobiographical piece that weaves in and around the two prologues. Subterranean Press is bringing it out in May. It's a very interesting document. If there were a subtext, it would be writing fiction as self-psychoanalysis. It's a very frank mixture of autobiography and painful material in the narrative. Gripping. I've never seen fiction and autobiography blended this way."

•

In the previous interview in *Cemetery Dance*, we had talked about the possibility of a short story collection. It sounded, at that time, as if the collection would be published in the near future. We're still waiting. I asked if there was anything new on that front.

"I keep hoping. The story collection is called *Black Evening*. It's a collection of all my short pieces until 1992. The last piece is one I did for Dennis Etchison called, "Nothing Will Hurt You." [Note: The story appears in *Metahorror*, an excellent anthology which includes Peter Straub, Joyce Carol Oates and Thomas Tessier among others {Donald Grant, Signed Limited/Dell Abyss 1992}.]

"It has an introduction, which talks about Stirling Silliphant and also Philip Klass/William Tenn, the other writer who was so important in my education as a writer. Tenn was the pen name he used, a very influential science fiction writer at Penn State, who befriended me and became my mentor there, and *First Blood* was dedicated to him. I talk about what I learned from both of them. And then there are little introductions to the pieces.

"Warner Books has the rights. But the trouble is that short story collections notoriously do poorly in the marketplace. They normally sell about half or a third of what a novel would. So Warner has had this book for about four years now, and they have been waiting for a time when we all feel it is right to bring it out, so people would buy it, and it wouldn't just sit on the shelves. I had heard that there was a chance that in the end of 1998, maybe at Christmas, a trade paperback would come out. But I don't think that's going to happen now. It will come out; it's just a question of when."

There is also a possibility that Cemetery Dance will publish a limited edition of the book.

•

When I first discovered David Morrell back in 1977, I started scouting around for anything he had written. There were stories in such magazines as *Ellery Queen*, *Alfred Hitchcock*, and *Night Cry*, and a myriad of anthologies, such as Charles L. Grant's *Shadows* series. I can promise you, if you haven't read all his short works, this collection, *Black Evening*, will not only be worth the wait, but it will cause you restless nights and disturbing dreams. If you are planning, or trying, to be a writer, it and the *Testament* chapbook could be textbooks on how to do it right. **– CD –**

Double Image

David Morrell

Reviewed by Mark Graham

Warner Books
Price: $25.00
448 pp.

When I started reviewing books in 1977, one of my first assignments was David Morrell's third novel, *Last Reveille*. In a letter that year Morrell told me that he had written the novel in extremely short (a page or two), very visual, chapters to suggest sepia-toned photographs in a century-old scrapbook. In fact, common in all of Morrell's novels is that visual, almost photographic quality. So, it is not surprising that eventually the author would use a photographer as protagonist in one of his novels. Morrell spent two years studying photography and photographers in order to capture the essence of this current novel's hero.

Just as there are two major stages in photography, capturing the image and developing the final product, the plot of *Double Image* goes through two stages, an unusual structural development, even for an author as versatile as David Morrell, who created Rambo in his first novel, *First Blood*; wrote *The Totem*, considered by most authorities the best werewolf novel this century; and who has become the quintessential thriller writer of the last two decades.

In the prologue of *Double Image*, award-winning news photographer Mitch Coltrane escapes from Dragan Ilkovic, a Serbian guerilla leader and mass murderer he has caught on film in the act of bulldozing the bodies of hundreds of his Muslim victims.

Published photographs of the atrocity raise an international outcry and force Ilkovic into hiding, making him impotent in his battle against the infidels. The mad killer swears revenge against the man who has thwarted him. After one of Coltrane's friends is assassinated, the photographer must employ some of the tactics of his enemy to save himself and those he loves. The reader expects the entire novel will follow this struggle. But, halfway into the book, this crisis is resolved, only to be replaced by a darker intrigue surrounding a missing Hollywood starlet, a house with a secret past, the photographer and two women. He is in love with one of them and obsessed with the other. The theme of obsession and resulting destruction is ubiquitous in the novel: Ilkovic's obsession with the demeaning and death of Coltrane; Coltrane's obsession with a woman in a photograph, and then, he thinks, with the woman herself; and that woman's obsession with power over the men in her life. If Edgar Allan Poe, the father of mad obsession, had written more than one novel, he might have gotten into situations much like this.

And there is no shortage of action in *Double Image*. In fact, one chase scene where Ilkovic and Coltrane try to kill each other in a burnt-out movie set rivals anything Morrell has written. In addition, the author has felt it necessary to include graphic sexual scenes, something that, for the most part, his previous novels have lacked. However, without these scenes it would have been impossible for any of the novel's major characters to be fully developed.

Some may quibble with the strange two-plot structure. It sure isn't what you would expect. Yet, I doubt you will complain about not getting your money's worth—two plots for the price of one. In a sense, I guess you could call this an episodic novel. And neither episode will disappoint you.

•

For the connoisseur Subterranean Press has just published a chapbook concerning Morrell's second novel. The author's description explains how this came about: "When I moved to Santa Fe (from Iowa City, where he had been a professor of English at the University of Iowa), I found two prologues to *Testament* that I forgot I had written. One of them is in first person; the other is in third person. The third person one is almost a complete narrative. It is almost a story. And I wrote a long autobiographical piece that weaves in and around the two prologues. If there were a subtext, it would be writing as self-psychoanalysis. It's a very frank mixture of autobiography and painful material in the narrative."

Testament is the novel many Morrell fans consider their favorite. It too deals with obsession and whether a human being is capable of going beyond it.

The newly released prologues will enlighten those who already love the novel and will serve as an appetizer for those who have yet to taste this pleasure.

This is a limited edition and unlikely to be published elsewhere. Hurry and order it if you want one; it should sell out fast. It really blew me away.

– CD –

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Cold Turkey is a new Sonja Blue novella by Nancy A. Collins. Crossroads Press chap-book. Signed. Only $12.00.

Excerpt from:

Wildest Dreams

Norman Partridge

Long-time *CD* favorite NORMAN PARTRIDGE's latest novel is *Wildest Dreams*, just out from Subterranean Press. Read on for an excerpt from an early draft of the novel.

CHAPTER ONE

I see ghosts.

This one was a little girl with long blond hair and a black dress. She sat on a footbridge that arched across a shallow creek, her little girl legs dangling over the side as she gazed down at the cold water rushing below.

I moved toward her, following a fern-choked path through old redwoods, but the little girl didn't notice me. Sometimes it's like that. Sometimes the dead don't see the living at all. Often, in fact. Often ghosts are no more threatening than old movie clips, fixed in time and place, forever repeating some action whose significance was lost long ago, perhaps even to them.

Of course, my footsteps were light. Maybe that was why she didn't notice me. A rusty blanket of dead redwood needles covered the path, but it wouldn't have mattered if the forest floor was salted with gravel — I can be quiet when I want to. So the sounds I made were hardly sounds at all, and what the little girl would have heard had she been listening was masked by the hollow sigh of clear creek water flowing to the sea.

Masked, until I stepped onto the wooden bridge and my boot heel rang down like a judge's gavel.

The ghost looked up with startled blue eyes that were as clear as the October sky.

But in this place the sky was no more than a distant memory. A bower of heavy redwood branches hid the creek, and the bridge, and the living and the dead from the sun. The shadows did not bother me, and neither did the little girl — there was nothing in her eyes to make me wary, or afraid.

I knew the girl could not say the same of mine. But even though I'd frightened her, she didn't look away. She studied my eyes as if she were searching for everything that lay behind them, and she didn't even blink.

I couldn't look away, either. Strange. As a child, I'd learned to ignore the dead. First the dull ones with their endless pantomimes, and later those whose actions were less predictable. By the time I was a teenager, I could spend a night in a room with a wailing spirit and sleep like a baby.

But there was something very different about

the little girl. I can't say it any plainer than that. Something I'd never seen before.

I smile at her, not knowing why.

"I'm sorry I scared you," I said.

"Oh, I wasn't scared. Not truly. I just didn't see you coming. Not many people come here, you know."

"I know."

"You'll be glad you did, though." She nodded toward the creek. "It's a nice place. Sometimes you see fish."

I unslung my backpack and sat down beside her. She moved closer. The nearness of her made me shiver, but I managed to hold onto my smile. I didn't want her to think that anything might be wrong.

Not that she noticed me at all. "Look!" she said, and her little hand brushed through mine with icy, transparent fingers as she pointed at the creek.

A steelhead shot through the water like a bullet, fighting the current all the way. A flash of scale like living sunshine, a splash of the steelhead's dark and powerful tail, and then it was gone.

The little ghost laughed. "Wasn't that beautiful?"

I nodded.

"He's going upstream. They go upstream to spawn."

I nodded again, and she looked at me with those clear, innocent eyes. I wondered if she knew what happened to steelhead after they spawned. I wasn't going to tell her. If she didn't know now, she didn't ever need to know.

"What's your name?" she asked.

"Clay," I said. "Clay Saunders."

"What's in your backpack, Clay Saunders?"

Watching the fish, I'd actually forgotten about the backpack. Just for a moment. It was black, and it was canvas, and you couldn't see the bloodstains on it unless you looked really hard.

I'd bought the pack in Baja six days before.

It sat between us on the bridge.

Already, flies were circling it.

I swallowed hard. I'd made a mistake. I should

have ignored the little ghost, and taken care of business, and gotten it over with the way I'd planned, and gone on.

But instead I'd stopped, and now there were questions.

That's the way it always is.

Anytime you stop, there are questions.

Questions are never good.

Without a word, I rose and slung the pack over one shoulder. I had to laugh at myself. Silly, getting nervous like that. Way past paranoid. After all, it wouldn't matter if I told the girl what was inside the backpack. She was dead. She wasn't going to tell anyone.

Still, I didn't want her to know.

I'd already scared her once, and once was enough.

A fly buzzed around her head. She swatted at it, not noticing as the insect passed through her hand. "You can trust me," she said. "I know how to keep a secret."

"I'm sure you do."

"Unless it's a surprise. Unless you're bringing me a present. Like something my daddy sent me." Her eyes brightened. "You don't know my daddy, do you?"

"I don't think so."

"Then what you've got can't be for me."

"No. It's for someone else. Someone I'm supposed to meet."

"A boy or a girl?"

"A girl."

She giggled. "Clay's got a girlfriend."

"Not quite." I laughed, but I didn't like the blush that warmed my face. Even if I was talking to a ghost, I was talking too much.

The girl didn't notice my discomfort. She stared into the creek, pretending to watch for another fish. But I knew that she was only pretending now. She hadn't forgotten me, or my backpack, at all.

She couldn't keep quiet for long. "I've been here all day," she said finally, "and I haven't seen any girl. Only you."

"We're not supposed to meet here, exactly." I glanced up at the redwood boughs that hid the sky from view. "I think I'm on the right trail, but I'm a city boy. Put me in the woods and I'm lost."

"I'm lost, too. At least I think I am. My daddy said he'd come back for me, but he hasn't. It's been a long time, too. But I just keep waiting, because that's what my daddy told me to do." She paused, staring at the water. "I don't mind waiting. Not really, It's nice here."

She reached out for my hand.

"We're alone, just like Hansel and Gretel," she said, and her voice whispered through the forest like a lonely wind that touches no one. But her fingers were like the wind, too, and though they passed through mine I knew that she had touched me, even if she could not hold my hand.

She kept on trying, though. Without a word. She didn't give up.

I couldn't look at her, but I tried to hold her hand. It was like trying to hold a five-fingered breeze. And while I tried, I wondered how long the little girl had been here. Her clothes were hard to place. That little black dress, simple and severe, like something out of the Addams family, but timeless in its way.

Maybe she'd been here a hundred years, or maybe less than ten. I couldn't decide. Maybe it was her youth. In a way, she seemed as timeless as her dress. Childhood innocence personified. That straight blond hair; and the way her blue eyes shone, even in death; and the way she talked — as if everything would turn out all right if she could just be patient a little while longer.

We couldn't hold hands. Not really. But we did our best.

I wondered how long it had been since someone had spoken to her.

I wondered how long she'd been alone.

I didn't want to ask those questions.

Questions are never good.

But there was one question I had to ask. "I'm looking for the bottle house," I began. "Do you know where it is?"

She nodded. "Sure." Her fingers drifted away from mine. "It's not far." She seemed to float away. "Follow me."

I did.

— CD —

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A Conversation with

DAVID B. SILVA

by Ivy Fehervari

David B. Silva's love for horror began in the early ages of childhood, but it wasn't until his early thirties that he first opened the door to *The Horror Show*. After an eight year run as editor of the popular horror magazine, Silva opened a new door and began to pursue his own writing. He has since written four novels and over one hundred short stories. But most recently, the editing bug, coupled with his desire to witness the reemergence of the horror field, has inspired him to start a new weekly non-fiction publication called *Hellnotes*.

Silva and co-editor Paul F. Olson (of *Horrorstruck* fame), began publishing *Hellnotes* in February of 1997 with the intent of informing and entertaining horror writers and horror readers alike. In their effort to do so, they've made a point of supporting not only name brand authors, but lessor known writers, publishers, and other small press venues as well, clearly giving horror a newsworthy voice that might not otherwise be heard.

Having had a chance to sit down with Mr. Silva, we discussed everything from the state of horror today to the need to keep readers informed about what's available in the genre.

CD: How did your career in horror begin?

SILVA: The only reason I ever got involved with horror is because I love the genre. I grew up on the *Twilight Zone* and that kind of stuff, and then eventually started reading in the genre and I just loved it and thought well . . . [Laughs].

I don't know how I got into it. I took a chance is what I did. In the early 80's I was working for the city of San Jose in their recreation department. I'd been working there for thirteen years and I had built up a little bit of a nest egg. I had a house and I was thirty years old, and I had to decide if I wanted to do that for the rest of my life. I was really lucky because I had parents that said, "Life if about doing what you want to do, and trying things." So I quit my job, sold my house, moved up to the mountains, and started up *The Horror Show*.

CD: You were editor of *The Horror Show* for almost a decade. What made you stop that and then start *Hellnotes*?

SILVA: I closed the cover on *The Horror Show* after my mother died from cancer and I decided that I should focus more attention on my writing. Publishing a magazine, as rewarding as it is, can totally absorb a person's life. I felt it was time to step back from it and explore my writing a little more than I had in the past.

Hellnotes came about nearly six years later. It was really the result of conversations between my co-editor, Paul F. Olson and myself. We were looking to do something together and we were looking at how quickly the world was changing as technology continued to make information more and more easily available. Finally, we decided to take the plunge with *Hellnotes*, hoping to fill a void in the field that had largely gone unfilled since Paul's non-fiction magazine, *Horrorstruck* had ceased publication four or five years earlier.

CD: *Hellnotes* is a very up to date publication. How do you acquire your news in such a timely manner?

SILVA: The news comes from a variety of sources. There are a number of channels on the Internet that touch on various aspects of the genre. Then we have the relationships with writers and editors and publishers that I developed while editing *The Horror Show* and Paul developed while editing *Horrorstruck*. And there are organizations such as the Horror Writers Association or the World Horror Convention which are looking to promote the field and their own activities. And booksellers looking to stay a step ahead of all the publishing news. And then there are people like Matt Schwartz, who has a genuine love for the genre and works hard to offer authors and publishers a place on the Internet where they can share their personal projects. We draw a little here, a little there. *Hellnotes* is sort of a central clearinghouse where it all gets distributed.

CD: Could you describe some of the features *Hellnotes* offers and what makes them so special?

SILVA: *Hellnotes* relays an enormous amount of information. You have to remember that a new issue comes out every week and runs about 4,000 words. Readers get book reviews by Brian Hodge, Bentley Little, and Hank Wagner; a regular New Releases column by Matt Schwartz that briefly announces the newest horror titles on the market; a weekly Market Report by Kathryn Ptacek to keep our writers up on all the best places to get published; a column by Peter Crowther on what's happening on the British horror scene; a UK New Release column by Andy Fairclough; news from Canada and Australia as it develops; movie and television news; author news and signings; plus lots of regular news items ranging from conventions to the Horror Writer's Association to just about anything having to do with the genre. If you read *Hellnotes*, you'll be up on the horror field like no one else.

CD: I've noticed you also print excerpts from Stanley Wiater's book, *Dark Thoughts on Writing* in *Hellnotes*. How long will you be running that feature?

SILVA: Oh, we'll probably run the quotes ongoing. When we were just getting started with the newsletter, Stanley gave me a call and we worked out the arrangement over the phone. I get to use whatever excerpts I want for as long as I believe the readers will enjoy them. It's been a perfect fit for *Hellnotes*. *Dark Thoughts* is a great book, and the answers are wonderfully insightful for anyone who has any affection at all for the genre. It's going to take a few years before we run through the last of them.

CD: Well, you certainly use a core of regular contributors. But does this leave any room for new blood?

SILVA: You bet. You have to remember that we're talking about a weekly newsletter. Fifty-two issues a year. There's plenty of space to be filled, and we're always looking for new ways to fill it. Interviews, author profiles, behind the scenes publishing and movie developments . . . we're looking at it all. We'd love to run an interview with an agent. We'd love to run an article about the trend of selling a book to the movies first and then finding a publisher. There's no shortage of possibilities.

CD: *Hellnotes* publishes an awful lot of interviews. What? Maybe twenty-five last year? Why the emphasis?

SILVA: Yeah, I think we ran somewhere between 25 and 30 interviews altogether. And to be perfectly honest, we like to do interviews. They're quick and easy to put together, and the readers enjoy them. Besides, they serve multiple purposes all at once. For us, they add some meat to the newsletter. For the readers, they provide some entertainment and insights. And for the authors, they offer an opportunity to plug a new book.

CD: *Hellnotes* interviews are generally shorter, aren't they?

SILVA: It's the nature of the beast. There's only so much space available in a weekly newsletter, and we have to make the most of it. But you're right. Most of our interviews run somewhere between one and two thousand words. Just enough to entertain. Not enough to bore.

CD: And after they appear in the newsletter, they spend some time on your website?

SILVA: For a wee bit. Maybe two months after an interview runs in the newsletter, I'll post it on the webpage. It'll sit there for another three or four months, then the newest batch of interviews bumps it off. I don't post all the interviews on the site, but most of them make it there.

CD: You've spoken about *Hellnotes* as a way of serving the horror community. Can you elaborate on this for me?

SILVA: Well, primarily what we would like *Hellnotes* to do is to remind people about how much is really going on in the horror field right now. When readers hear about a new chapbook or a new novel by someone they haven't

read before, we want them to take a chance on it. And if they like it, then maybe they'll share it with someone else, and that person will share it with yet another person. That's the only way the field is going to grow. By word of mouth. But it doesn't start until people have easy access to what's going on in the genre. That's what *Hellnotes* is all about.

CD: You aren't just promoting anything that comes along, are you?

SILVA: Actually, we aren't promoting anything at all. We're informing. And to do that we not only tell readers what's available and how to get it, but we try to help them make an intelligent decision about what's right for them. Our book reviewers are established writers within the genre. They themselves have received good reviews and bad reviews. They've learned the value of honesty, even when it hurts. And they deliver that honesty in their own reviews of other books in the genre. You won't find anyone trashing horror in *Hellnotes*, but you won't find anyone praising work that they don't believe in, either.

CD: The newsletter recently celebrated its one-year anniversary. Is there anything you learned from this first year?

SILVA: I learned there was a lot more going on with horror than I had ever imagined. It surprised me. It honestly did. Like everyone else, I had heard that horror was dead. But the truth wasn't nearly that simple. There were still a lot of writers in the field. And there were a lot of small press projects going on. And, not so surprising, there were a lot of horror novels that were being published as thrillers or suspense. So it was a wonderfully pleasant surprise to find out that horror was alive after all.

CD: You really seem to enjoy keeping in touch with your readers. That's very cool. I've dealt with other editors who aren't as friendly with their readers.

SILVA: Really? I've always felt that the readers were the most important part of doing something like *Hellnotes* or *The Horror Show*. If you don't have readers, you don't have a publication. Besides, the readers and I share a common love of the genre so it's actually fun to keep in touch with them. And it's not unusual for them to pass along tips about new books coming out or new author projects that I might have otherwise missed. It's like a family that way. Everyone pitching in to build the best newsletter possible.

CD: Playing a little devil's advocate here, why should a writer/reader spend ten dollars a year for *Hellnotes* when there are plenty of free newsletters being offered?

SILVA: Well, you know how the saying goes: you get what you pay for. Hey, if you aren't willing to pay ten dollars for a year of *Hellnotes* then it's time for me to pull the plug and move onto something else. *Hellnotes* delivers. It's as simple as that. You want interviews with your favorite authors, turn to *Hellnotes*. You want to keep up on the newest releases? *Hellnotes*. You want honest book reviews? *Hellnotes*. Market reports, news, a weekly quiz with free books as prizes. It's worth every penny of the ten dollars.

CD: So . . . is there one single, best selling point for *Hellnotes*?

SILVA: Oh, if I had to name only one, I guess it would probably be timeliness. I don't think there is anywhere else — and I can say this somewhat confidently — I don't think there is anywhere else in the world where you can find as much information on the horror field, in as timely a manner, as you can find it in *Hellnotes*. If you want to know what is going on in horror today, *Hellnotes* is your best source.

CD: Maybe this is the best way to end this: why is now the time for *Hellnotes*? Why not five years ago?

SILVA: Five years ago, I don't think *Hellnotes* would have been possible. What makes it so perfect for today is that not only is the technology available to produce a newsletter each and every week and put in the hands of readers almost instantly, but there's an emerging tide within the genre. More things are going on. Small press publishers are putting out new lines of books and chapbooks. New authors are venturing into the genre. There really, truly is a lot going on in the field.

* * * * *

Hellnotes is published 52 times a year by Phantasm Press. Subscriptions are available for $10 per year (E-mail), $40 per year (U.S. Mail), or $49 per year (fax). Send check or money order made out to David B. Silva.

Dave enjoys hearing from his readers so if you have any questions or would like to sample a free issue of *Hellnotes*, he can be reached at dbsilva@shasta.com or snail mail to, *Hellnotes*, 27780 Donkey Mine Road, Oak Run CA 96069. If you're cruising cyberspace definitely click on to: http://www.hellnotes.com. You'll find past interviews, the *Hellnotes* bookstore, and a slew of other gruesome goodies. — CD —

When the Penny Drops

Jack Ketchum

Jack Ketchum is the award-winning author of *Red*, *The Girl Next Door*, and many other acclaimed novels.

for Mort Levin

Bear with me.

I have a story to tell but first, bear with me. It'll take just a moment.

Here's the thesis.

It's from the mysterious that we make the leap to godly grace or evil.

And only from there.

A little knowledge, which is all we'll ever have, is a dangerous thing.

My wife and I were having dinner with friends one evening some years ago at an outdoor cafe on Columbus Avenue and as sometimes happens even when you don't particularly want it to happen the conversation got around to religion, organized and otherwise — and I recalled the story about the Eskimo and the Missionary. The Eskimo asks the Missionary, *if I knew nothing at all about this god of yours and nothing about sin, would I go to hell?* and the Missionary says no, of course not.

Then why on earth, asks the Eskimo, *did you tell me?*

My wife laughed. My friends, both of whom would go on to be critics for the *New York Times Book Review*, smiled thinly.

But the point of the story I think is not that innocence is grace or even good. The Eskimo is not the Noble Savage. It is that knowlege is never complete, it brings with it a core of mystery, of the seemingly impenetrable — and with that a dangerous complexity of light and dark, brightness and shadow which must be penetrated at least to some degree even to make out everyday objects against the looming sky or teeming earth and, lest we stumble, begin to see.

But there I go, talking like a cameraman again. Sorry.

At the time of our conversation on Columbus Avenue I'd been working for ABC News for roughly five years. I'd photographed the Super Bowl and the Rangers, crime scenes and celebrity galas, floods in Iowa and fires in California, mayoral and presidential campaigns and other natural disasters. I liked the work almost as much as I'd loved my Brownie box camera as a boy, roaming the deep Maine woods. I liked the business of watching, the keen eye, the quick fine moment of reaction when the picture either works or doesn't, I liked the frame of things and the roiling images.

My wife Laura was a journalist for the airline industry. This meant that we were hardly ever home at the same time. The two of us were always flying off somewhere, Laura to cover a convention or a scandal or a merger, myself to God knows where and to God knows what purpose, at the service of some breaking story. It was the major reason we had no children. I think it was also the major reason we were so happy, at least initially. As newlyweds we had no time to doubt one another or question each other's decisions, to deal with the small personal peeves and grievances that can separate two people starting off together. Time was flowing fast and our business was mostly to hang on — and to hang onto one another in the process.

And over time it deepened. There's a sheer simple joy in cooperating with another living soul under difficult circumstances that's highly underrated. For two people who are mostly apart and provided that there's love to begin with, every meeting is glue. It is a soft glue which allows for great elastic pullings apart, thin fibrous stretchings over cities and continents, space and time. But each strand is of exactly the same composition. It *wants* to come together. Its chemical goal

is to return to the unity from which it sprang in the first place. And it does.

It did for us.

But in the summer of 1969 we'd been married over a year and we'd yet to have a honeymoon of any real duration. We'd snatch a long summer weekend at Sag Harbor between assignments and say, okay, this is our honeymoon or else schedule a couple of days to rent a car and drive upstate for Thanksgiving turkey dinner at some country inn and that was our honeymoon too. Our honeymoons were like bright Fall leaves in a swirling wind, hard to catch but lovely when you did.

It was August and so hot in Manhattan that most of the cabbies smelled like old salami sandwiches left out to bake in the sun. I'd just finished covering Woodstock, four hundred thousand kids intent on grabbing peace and love and drugs and music with both hands, a three-day sweet-minded nightmare of traffic, rain, mud and awful sanitation. The week before I'd been in Los Angeles covering the Tate murders. I was burnt out and exhausted. I begged a break in the great unending chain of stories and miraculously I got one — five days off. Nine when you counted the weekends.

And where was Laura? Laura was in Athens, working on an article about Olympic Airlines. It turned out she was nearly finished. I hopped a plane.

We didn't stay there. Only the most weak-kneed tourists do. Athens was bombed heavily during the second World War and then jerrybuilt thereafter. Other than Plaka — the Old Town near the Parthenon — and Lycabettus Hill across the valley, Athens is not a fine city. It's grey and homely to the eye. We spent one night with me recuperating from the flight and the first thing next morning, headed by cab for the port of Pireaus and then by ferry to Mykonos in the Cyclades.

In August inland Mykonos is sere as a desert. You half expect to see a barefoot prophet, staff in hand, walk over the next rise. You're lucky to see a green thing anywhere unless it's a tourist's crumpled pack of Salems. On the shore, though, there's always a breeze and you can be comfortable sitting in ninety degree weather all day long. Laura and I stayed by the shore, in a small eight-room hotel which overlooked the harbor.

We had a wonderful time. We spent days basking under clear skies and swimming the turquoise sea at a nude beach which could only be reached by ferry, Laura careful of the pale tender breastflesh which prior to then had never seen the sun. We spent warm breezy evenings sitting in the outdoor tavernas over wine and *mezes*, seaweed-green *domadakia*, grilled shrimp and calamari, fish-roe *taramasalata* and spicy *keftedes*. Nights we went back to each other's bodies laughing like street kids with a secret. Or like swimmers adrift in the Aegean, bouyed by ageless waters.

We met French tourists and English tourists and Dutch tourists and many of the locals — those who still retained the fortitude and amiability to deal with all these outsiders three months into the season. We struggled with language. There was a lot of laughing and dancing in the clubs and a lot of drinking and no headaches in the morning whatsoever for either of us.

The night before we were set to leave we had dinner at the Sunset Bar on the side of the island opposite the harbor and watched a magnificent red ball descend into slowly darkening waters, blue-green to purple to black. We waved to an Australian couple we knew sitting at a nearby table but didn't invite them over. We were saying goodbye to the island. The honeymoon — our first real honeymoon — was almost over. We took our time over wine and dinner and creme caramel afterwards and rich dark coffee. We took a couple glasses of Metaxa brandy after that.

I paid the bill and we got up and hand in hand roamed the island in the style to which we'd become accustomed, getting ourselves purposely, happily lost in the narrow whitewashed streets which wound uphill and down and then up again past windmills stark against the seascape and shops and small whitewashed houses with blue milkpaint shutters. Every now and then we could hear music from the clubs spill through the warm windless night, distant echos of Dionysus. Finally our hotel was near. We decided on one last brandy at a harborside taverna.

We sat at an outdoor table. And that was when I realized my pocket was empty.

That my wallet was missing.

To retrace our steps was impossible. Too much meandering down too many streets in a town designed specifically as a labyrinth to foil ancient pirates. There was only one hope of finding the damn thing and that was that I'd dropped it back at the restaurant after paying our bill. We searched the ground anyway. And now there was nothing happy about getting lost along the way. We made wrong turns, bad decisions, we had to retrace our steps. I began to feel the way those pirates must have felt, frustrated and bewildered and angry. *Those goddamn Mykonians!* Couldn't they draw a single straight line to *anywhere*?

Finally we found our way to the restaurant and hailed our waiter. He was grinning, happy to see us again. He had just enough English to understand what we were saying. His grin vanished into a grimace like a sudden squall at sea. He was instantly all

business, a tall thin aproned squall himself, peering under tables, collaring every waiter, every busboy, going from table to table asking the patrons and into the kitchen to question the cooks. It took maybe all of ten minutes, that's how fast he was and when he returned to us he looked so dejected you'd have thought it was *his* wallet, not mine. Or that it was some close relative I'd lost and not a wallet at all.

We thanked him and started home. He'd refused Laura's offer of a tip. We didn't push it. He was a good man and he had pride.

I tried not to be sullen.

Losing the wallet was a major annoyance, especially in a foreign country but that was *all* it was — that was what I kept telling myself. Don't spoil five terrific days over one curdled night. I still had my passport and Laura had plenty of cash. No problem. But it hung there in the air ahead of us with each step we took, something dark and empty-feeling pressing my head down to scan and search the street in front of me.

We climbed the steps to the hotel. In the lobby Theodoro, the night man, was grinning at us from behind the desk and I remember having the small-minded thought that inappropriate grinning was perhaps a Greek trait.

"*Paracalo*," he said. *Please.* He held up his hand like a traffic cop.

He reached into the desk drawer and pulled out my wallet.

"A gentleman returns this to you," he said.

He handed it to me. License, credit cards, drachmas, U.S. money. Not a thing was missing.

I was used to New York. I was used to London or Rome or Paris. Amazing.

Of course, I thought. The address was printed on the hotel's card and the card was in the wallet. Still amazing.

"Who was he? Did he leave a name?"

I figured he deserved a reward.

He shook his head. "I do not know him. He ask me for an envelope and piece of paper. For you."

He handed me the envelope and I opened it. In a neat blue felt-tip scrawl the man had written *Do the same for someone else someday.*

That was all.

I remember that I did feel touched. It was such a generous thing to do, such a delightful thing to say to me. But I did not immediately feel touched by mystery.

It brushed by me all the same.

•

I have almost nothing left of my father. My mother and he divorced bitterly when I was only sixteen. He moved from our home in New Jersey to Florida and took up with a woman he met on the plane en route to Fort Myers. I never visited. One night about eighteen months later he was coming home drunk from a party and wrapped his car around a tree. He lingered a few days, she died instantly. I didn't go to his funeral either though I regret that now. But at the time I was still too angry.

I have a few old photos, those few my mother didn't burn after he left and I have his ring. He left it on my night table the day he moved his things. The ring is gold with a large ruby inset, squarish and heavy. For a long time I wouldn't wear it, not even after he died. It sat in my drawer straight through college and for years thereafter. I don't know exactly what made me change my mind about the ring except that I've heard it said that we never renounce the ones we love, we replace them. And perhaps by then I'd replaced my hurt angry love for my father with a far gentler love for Laura.

But once I began I wore it every day. I took it off only to go to bed at night and to wash my hands. Putting the ring on again every morning was as much unconscious ritual as shaving or brushing my teeth.

One night in October of 1989 I was in a bar in Greenwich Village called the Lion's Head drinking with some friends. I wasn't known there, my friends were. It was their local bar. Laura was out of town again. I was restless.

At some point I got up and went to the john to relieve my bladder and afterwards I washed my hands and then I continued drinking. When it became clear that one more Dewars rocks was going to send me well over the top I quit and paid the tab and said goodnight and hailed a cab uptown. It was almost midnight.

The cab was at 10th Avenue and 57th Street before I missed the ring.

I knew what I'd done right away. I'd left it on the sink when I washed my hands.

I felt a kind of panic. Cabbies as a rule are not terribly flexible and this one must have thought I was crazy. I told him to turn around *now* and head back to the Lion's Head as fast as he could and that if he got there in less than twenty minutes he'd *get* twenty dollars tip. We were there in twenty-five. I gave him the twenty anyhow.

My friends were gone. In the bathroom the ring was gone too. I went to the bartender. He smiled and put my ring on the bar and turned a cocktail napkin face-up in front of me. At first I thought he was going to pour me a drink. And then I read the nap-

kin.

Do the same for someone else someday, it read.

The hand was barely legible. The bartender didn't know the guy, said he'd never seen him before. Said he had a few beers and left. Good tipper. Average height, average build. Joe Average.

I remembered Mykonos. I entered mystery.

•

Mystery seeths with promise and promiscuity. Most of the creatures of the earth are born in huge numbers, an almost unimaginable promise of life each Spring, the vast majority of them only in order to die ugly and die young before they are fully formed. Billions upon billions of insect larva — maggot, grub, caterpillar, lacewing, mosquito. Their entire business is in the jaws, in the eating. That and the business of transformation. Killing cabbage leaf and cotton leaf, oak and elm, only to be hunted down by other larger creatures who've developed a taste for them as specifically as theirs for cabbage — or to be eaten alive from within by the swarming hatchlings of some parasite. A specific taste of the parasite's too. And again like the larva, also measured in the billions born and billions dying, because these same parasites are themselves very tasty to other critters. Promise and promiscuity. That's the business of living and the entire mystery is why. To what end? To perpetuate exactly what?

That and transformation. Take a stumpy furry crawling earthbound body and turn it light as a feather, give it delicate lacy wings. Turn rending jaws to sipping proboscis.

The word *larva* means *ghost* or *mask.*

•

I was, I suppose, in my larval stage.

I'm past it now.

I know what I fed upon, my own personal version of the cabbage leaf. I fed upon my work, on the world I saw through the viewfinder. A limited world and in no sense a true world but my own, one I was capable of and even adept at seeing.

That and Laura.

That very first night many years ago we met awkwardly, Laura and I, over dinner with mutual friends at their East Side apartment. Neither of us knew the other was supposed to be there. It was an ambush for us both and it didn't work out one bit. My excuse for leaving was *her* leaving. I was going to be a gentleman and see her to a cab and anyway, I had to work next morning. Good night, folks. And don't try this again.

Then on the street a strange thing happened. We started talking about how awful and awkward it was up there and we both started laughing — genuinely laughing for the first time that night. We made fun of our friends all the way to the corner. When the cab pulled up on an impulse I asked her if she had a good memory for numbers and she said yes, as a matter of fact she did. I rattled off my telephone number and she smiled and nodded and the cab pulled away.

It was a month before she called me. I'd almost forgotten all about her. Wasn't even certain I'd recognize her. But when she stepped into the bar and we started talking it didn't take more than an hour before I knew I'd never forget her. Not this woman. This one was a keeper. Funny and smart and once you started really looking, lovely. And we couldn't stop talking and after a while we couldn't stop touching each other either — it was like kind of horizontal gravity. Hand upon hand, hand reaching up to touch arm or shoulder and finally in the wee dazed hours of the morning in this Midtown upscale bar new to both of us and almost empty, almost closing and in full view of the bartender, hand to cheek and lips to lips, yes, Laura and I necking in front of strangers, necking gently like a pair of teenagers, like people we might view with amusement or disapproval had it not been us doing the kissing. Intoxicated and not with drink. And that was the way it stayed.

It stayed that way until last year.

•

It was July and hot and we were both in the city for a change.

Laura was going to make dinner, a light salad, some bread and cheese. She'd gone into the liquor store to pick out a bottle of wine. I was across the street at the Pathmark buying cigarettes. Trying to quit hadn't taken again.

Despite its reputation Manhattan isn't all that dangerous, especially not around Lincoln Center. I'm told we have the safest precinct in the City. But safety's a relative matter. Tell the one doomed goose in thirty who flies off the lake with the rest and gets blown out of the sky by some hunter that basically, he's been safe.

The gunman must have thought the store was empty. Laura was squatting in the aisle reading wine labels when he walked in and demanded money from the kid at the counter. Then she must have stood and startled him. The weapon was a thirty-eight and the range was close, no more than a dozen feet and he shot her three times, in the face, hip and chest and

then ran away in panic. She would have survived the first two bullets. But the third found her heart exactly.

I heard nothing. No shots. I saw no one running away. What I did see was a group of five or six people peering in through the doorway to the liquor store. No police yet, no sirens. But it didn't *look* right. And Laura was inside. I crossed the street feeling like I was slogging through mud, my head suddenly pounding. For the first time in years I could feel my heartbeat. I elbowed through the crowd and into the store.

I won't describe this in any detail. I refuse to. There are some things not worth telling. My wife, my lover, my twenty-eight-year companion, the woman I slept with and woke with and laughed with and held in my arms was dead on the floor in a pool of blood and wine studded with bright stained shards of glass and that's all you need to know.

But at times like these you notice, you *see* the craziest things and they loom with their own unaccustomed weight. I saw not the racks and rows of bottles but the flourescent lights overhead, columns bright as suns. I saw the spinning fan above me, like a propeller displaced from its ship and planted in the ceiling. I saw cracks in the walls like the veins in some huge wrist. I turned to look for help from whoever was at the counter but the boy had long since gone looking for a policeman, before I even arrived.

In front of me the cash register was a small grey mountain. It looked impregnable. There was a wicker basket of corkscrews and bottle openers beside it like somebody's jagged metal picnic.

And beside that a small box of pennies.

It was the box that did it, that finally made my legs go, that made the world tilt and fall.

•

Three's the charm they say.

In my *Webster's II Dictionary*, definition number six for *charm* is *incantation of a magic word or verse.*

I have never believed in magic. Unless magic was the captured image. Life lived over and over again in patterns on a screen.

Or unless magic was Laura.

But the ring had already introduced me to mystery.

Remember my thesis? *It's from the mysterious that we make the leap to godly grace or evil.*

And only from there.

You see these penny boxes all around in New York City. In Love Cosmetics. At Tower Video. You see them everywhere. Usually all they say is *take a penny, leave a penny* but with this one someone had gotten more elaborate.

It said *take one if you need one.*

And do the same for someone else someday.

•

They never caught the man who killed her. The kid behind the counter's description was impressionistic. Male, mid-to-late twenties, caucasian or light Hispanic, Jets teeshirt and jeans. Medium height, medium weight, medium build.

All those mediums. All those greys.

A thief in shadow. A killer under flourescent light.

A dangerous complexity of light and dark, brightness and shadow. Promise and promiscuity. That was what killed her. And I ask *to what end? To perpetuate exactly what?*

•

I sold some stocks. I gave notice at ABC. I was no longer interested in that kind of seeing. I started looking elsewhere.

•

The world pushes pins on a bulletin board we pass daily and on that board are scraps of paper, messages which have no order or design but of which we must make order and design for better or worse.

If not we go mad.

I did my homework and found the right location for the store, a place down on the Lower East Side in Alphabet City. I closed the sale within a month. The gun permit took longer and I waited for that to come along before the opening. In the meantime I made arrangements with the liquor distributors and did some remodeling. When the permit came through I bought a thirty-eight Smith & Wesson and put it on a shelf behind the register. It's there now.

The store's been robbed four times over the past fourteen months so I got it for a song. I figure it's only a matter of time before somebody tries again. I'm not looking for the guy who shot Laura. I know the odds on that. But somebody. Please god.

Someone else someday.

I've got to give it back.

The wallet. The ring.

The penny.

– CD –

EYES OF PREY

The sequel to the Stoker nominated HUNGRY EYES

By Barry Hoffman

"Barry Hoffman understands fear's ways. He understands the pacing and details of how to unsettle. His talent speaks for itself, and in Eyes of Prey, the chances he takes are startling."

–Richard Christian Matheson

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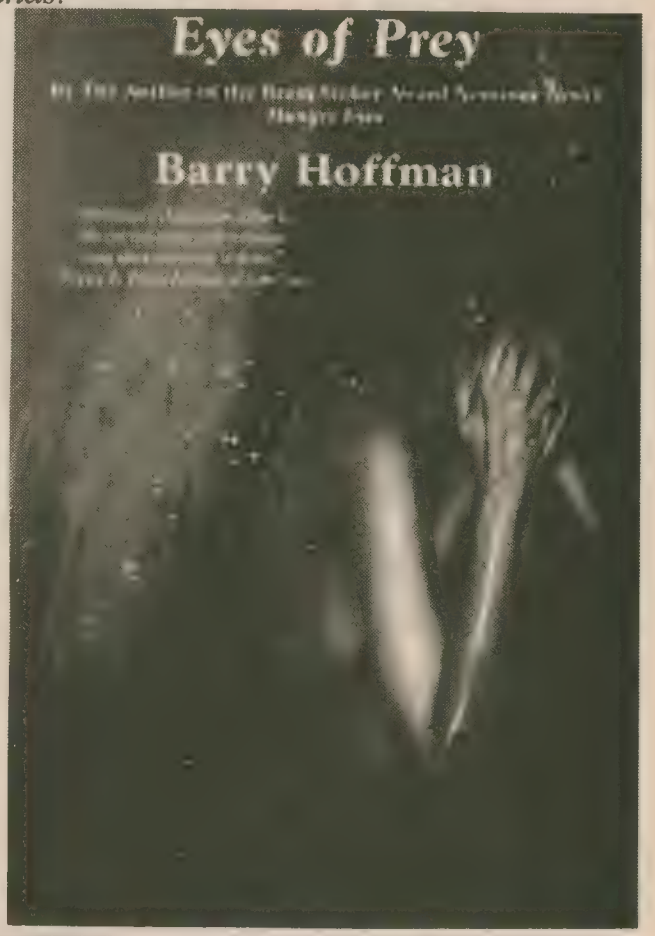

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JOHN PELAN

COLLECTING MODERN HORROR

Collecting Modern Horror?

You've been collecting horror a few years, you find it possible to keep up with the new releases, and you've read the non-fiction work by scholars in the field such as Doug Winter, Stanley Wiater, & S.T. Joshi . . . Some of that older stuff sounds interesting, but where do you acquire it? And where do you start? Well, several titles stick in your mind as being recommended by several critics with adjectives such as "essential," indispensable," and "cornerstone." You decide that you ought to get copies of *Ghost Stories of an Antiquary* by M.R. James, *The Night Land* by William Hope Hodgson, and *The Outsider and others* by H.P. Lovecraft.

Having made up your list of three books that everyone seems to agree are vital to a collection of modern horror you begin to make some phone calls; the first bookseller has a badly damaged copy of the Lovecraft book, when he quotes a price you assume he's joking. He isn't. As you make a few more calls it becomes apparent that first editions of these volumes are tremendously expensive, to the point that you feel it unlikely that you'll be able to read these stories that the critics have raved about . . .

Welcome to the first installment of a column which although highly-opinionated and maybe from time to time irritating in its prejudices I hope will ultimately serve as a useful tool in building a solid collection of modern horror fiction. Over the years I've amassed a rather large collection of books, many of which have turned out to be valuable additions to my library, some of which have turned out to be turkeys that were overpriced even when they were on the remainder tables. You see there just really isn't a comprehensive guide or reference work that keeps budgetary concerns in mind.

There are some excellent references or lists available, Stanley Wiater's top 113 in his book *Dark Thoughts: On Writing* would be difficult to improve on, Stephen Jones book *Horror: 100 Best Books* is very useful, Marshall Tymn's book on horror and the supernatural is a wonderful reference work. However, I'm going to come at this from another angle. If you're collecting modern horror, you've probably bought a number of limited edition books because you prefer the presentation and permanence of a nicely bound hardcover volume. The central topic in each installment will be devoted to assembling a core collection of modern horror.

Another function of this column will be to direct you to titles that for any of a number of reasons may be quick to go out of print. A number of people missed out on the Dutro Press Thomas Ligotti book with the *Current 93* accompanying CD because they didn't place advance orders. After all, the book was announced as being issued in a 2000 copy run. 2000 copies should be plenty even for an author as popular as Thomas Ligotti, right? Well not exactly . . . See, apparently most of the copies went to record stores and *Current 93's* mailing list. After you take all the copies allocated to the record stores and *Current 93* devotees there are perhaps 500 copies left to go around. That's it, just 500 copies of a new book by an author who'd just won the Bram Stoker Award to be distributed in the USA. Demand suddenly exceeded the supply. If you can find the Ligotti book for anything under $50.00, that's prob-

ably as good a price as you're likely to get. It may be that some of the copies from England resurface on the secondary market, but don't count on it.

As Stanley Wiater's top 113 in his book *Dark Thoughts: On Writing* provides an excellent representation of recent books, I'm going to use 1973 as our cut-off date, as most of you are very familiar with stuff published in the last twenty-five years. Since there are already a number of fine lists available, I'll focus on this from a budgetary perspective as follows.

No book on the list should regularly retail for more than $50.00; I've done extensive research on this to verify that one can usually obtain all these titles for under our ceiling price. Now I didn't say it was easy, you may have to do some poking around, but hell, the pursuit's half the fun isn't it? So here's the remaining criteria I'm suggesting in assembling a core collection of modern horror.

They are comprised primarily of work published between 1900-1973. Some volumes may include material either earlier or later, but they consist mostly of work written during this time frame. I'm assuming that you're pretty much up on major books done in the last quarter century. Or if not, pick up one the reference sources mentioned above.

They are obtainable for under $50.00 in a hardcover edition. Now I'm not suggesting that all of these titles will be at that price for a "gem mint" copy. Let's be real, lots of this stuff is over 50-60 years old. We're talking a "presentable" copy here. Condition should be vg, if the book came with a dustjacket, the jacket should be present.

Only one book per author or editor is cited. There are a number of authors whose "complete works" are well worth picking up, but in the interest of diversity we're only listing one book per author or editor.

This criteria leaves some unfortunate omissions from the list, obviously Manly Wade Wellman should be represented by his short stories, however neither *Lonely Vigils* or *Worse Things Waiting* seem to be obtainable for under the ceiling price. In the case of Frank Belknap Long, *The Hounds of Tindalos* is superior to the volume I've cited here. There are some fine pieces in *The Early Long*, but the Arkham House book is much better. The same is true of some other very fine authors, one can only hope that some of the reprint specialists like Fedogan & Bremer, Ash-Tree, or Tartarus Press see fit to pick up some of these early gems and reprint them in the near future.

Some other authors who've been omitted entirely include Charles Birkin, (most of his best material was in paperback originals in the sixties), Greye La Spina, (her wonderful short novel *Invaders from the Dark*, is regrettably way over our self-imposed limit of $50.00). Absent also from the list are Richard Matheson and Ray Bradbury. For Matheson fans his volume of *Collected Stories* is in the $100.00 to $150.00 range and a bargain at that price, coming in with over 900 pages! For Bradbury, inexpensive reprint editions of most of his books are available, unfortunately this is not the case with either *Dark Carnival* or *The October Country*. Barry Hoffman at Gauntlet has done a superb anniversary edition of the latter for $65.00, which is considerably less than you would pay for a beat up copy of the first edition.

With those caveats out of the way let's get on with building our collection. For those of you who take this list to heart and make some purchases based on our recommendations, e-mail me at jpelan@cnw.com and I'll be happy to make mention of your acquisitions. A lot of these books will take a bit more effort than just logging on to ABE for a few minutes. They're out there, but it may take a bit of poking around in general antiquarian bookstores, sending want-lists and that sort of thing to turn up some of the older titles.

We'll be covering ten books in each column, space permitting. To start the ball rolling, let's begin with the three books our hypothetical collector was looking for to start off his collection:

The Night Land – William Hope Hodgson: Well if you really want a nice first, there's a copy out there with a signed letter from Hodgson laid in that'll set you back $6000.00. A more modest purchase of the Arkham House omnibus of *The House on the Borderland* will run you between $300.00 and $500.00 and you'll get the beautiful Hannes Bok dustjacket along with the complete texts of *The Night Land, The Ghost Pirates, The Boats of the Glen Carrig* as well as the title novel.

However, for the purposes of this list we'll recommend the Hyperion edition published in 1976. It's not fancy, but it is a hardcover of Hodgson's most ambitious novel and shouldn't run much over $35.00. In many ways Hodgson can be considered to be Lovecraft's superior in delineating the vistas of an eerie and hostile universe. Lovecraft decries Hodgson's romantic elements in his essay *Supernatural Horror in Literature*, but many readers find that the elements that Lovecraft disdained lend a sense of epic tragedy to his novel that makes it all the more memorable. His portraitures of the vast Watchers po-

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sitioned around The Last Redoubt with the last humans gathered within are among the most chilling visions in all of horror literature. Hodgson's influence on Lovecraft and other of the *Weird Tales* writers such as Donald Wandrei and Frank Belknap Long is evident. One can easily see Hodgson's influence in Wandrei's "The Red Brain" and Long's chilling masterpiece "Second Night Out," and one can see a connection with the contemporary work of the outstanding British author Simon Clark in disturbing tales such as "Salt Snake." A source of regret is the absence of an inexpensive omnibus of Hodgson's short fiction; his stories of the sea and the terrors lurking beneath the surface are as effective today as they were eighty years ago. The Arkham House book *Deep Waters* is quite expensive, ranging from $85.00 to $125.00, but well worth seeking out; the price tag is all that precludes it from inclusion on our list. On a brighter note, two recent volumes of previously uncollected stories *The Haunted Pampero* and *Terrors from the Sea* from Donald M. Grant are available from most mail-order dealers; and an earlier volume *Out of the Storm* can be had for around $55.00 to $65.00.

Moving along to Lovecraft, we find that most of his best fiction is gathered up in the Arkham edition of *The Dunwich Horror and others*. The early printings of the book sport a Lee Brown Coye dustjacket and the first printing is somewhat pricey. What you want is the 6th (or later) printing with the Bob Eggleton dustjacket. Although listed by the publisher as a "printing," this is really a second "edition" featuring text that has been meticulously researched by S.T. Joshi to restore each piece to be as close to Lovecraft's preferred version as possible.

Though incredibly wrongheaded about most modern horror, Joshi does know his Lovecraft and the book is a stellar example of scrupulous scholarship and painstaking editing. Best of all, we find the book is only twenty-two bucks new! If you haven't read Lovecraft yet, go ahead, put down the magazine, rush out and buy this book and read "Pickman's Model" and "The Music of Erich Zann;" we'll wait . . .

Okay, you've read the stories? Great, the rest of the book is

equally good; there's a lot more to the work of HPL than the bastardized versions of the Cthulhu Mythos pushed on us for years by August Derleth. *The Dunwich Horror* and *The Color out of Space* are great examples of Lovecraft's recurring theme of ordinary people colliding violently with the cosmic horror manifested in his Great Old Ones. The weakest elements of Lovecraft's work include cardboard characters and an occasional tendency to prose of a violet hue, but his best work holds up very well today and this collection is a great starting point. We must repeat, if your exposure to Lovecraft has been limited to inferior anthologies of self-referential Mythos stories, you've missed some great works.

Moving on to the M.R. James title we find that later bindings in fair condition can be had for under $100.00, or if you insist a first may be purchased from a low end of around $1200.00 for a copy that has seen better days up to $4500.00+ for a presentation copy signed by the great man himself. May we suggest as an affordable alternative: the very serviceable edition of *The Ghost Stories of M.R. James* edited by Michael Cox (Oxford University Press 1986). For the sum of $25-$35 you get fifteen of James' best stories in a decent hardcover edition.

Most authors of the traditional ghost story owe a great deal to James. The prose has held up reasonably well over the years, and his recurring theme of innocent folk blundering upon a malign entity resulting in dire consequences is as effective today as ever. A major strength of James' fiction is the prosaic, almost matter-of-fact narration of his tales; the effect is much the same as if the chap on the next barstool told you he'd seen a pack of ghouls feasting in the cemetery on his way to the pub. . . The result in most of James better tales is that at some point you'll stop reading and glance around the room to verify that things are as they should be. . . a higher compliment cannot be paid to a practitioner of the supernatural horror story. . .

James inspired a host of contemporaries to try their hand at the art of the spectral tale and many of "The James Gang" turned out fine fictions that will be discussed further on in this column. Many of these early and scarce volumes are being reprinted by the good folks at Ash-Tree Press in handsome editions of 350-500 copies. Work by such authors as A.N.L. Munby, R.H. Malden, and the Bensons are now being brought back into print in volumes that fit nicely under our $50.00 ceiling. If you like the current work of people like Terry Lamsley and Ron Weighell, it's a cinch that you'll find much in M.R. James to admire.

The Early Fears — Robert Bloch: Fedogan & Bremer 1994. Where else can you get over $500.00 worth of early Arkham House books for under $30.00? A rhetorical question to be sure; this volume collects the contents of both *The Opener of the Way* and *Pleasant Dreams* in one volume. Both of your columnists admit to a certain prejudice regarding this book, Bloch being the author that brought us both into the horror field at approximately the same ages. Some of the earliest stories such as "The Feast in the Abbey" are spoiled by an unwitting dose of melodramatic silliness, but hell, how many seventeen-year olds are capable of doing better? Happily included here are such masterpieces as "Yours Truly, Jack the Ripper" and "Enoch," fine stories that serve as precursors to what was to come later in a truly illustrious career.

Other great pieces included are "That Hell Bound Train" (winner of the Hugo Award for *Science Fiction???*) and "Beetles." If your only acquaintance with Bloch's work is *Psycho*, you're in for a treat. Robert Bloch wrote in the horror genre longer than most (a career spanning nearly sixty years), but he also did it better than most. . .

The Selected Writings of Lafcadio Hearn: Citadel Press 1949. We're cheating just a tad here, some of the pieces in this volume were written before the turn of the century, however, to omit this book on such narrow grounds would be unforgivable. Hearn was a truly remarkable individual. After emigrating to Japan he was inspired to relate some of the traditional ghost stories of his adopted country in prose.

Resulting volumes include *Some Chinese Ghosts* with unforgettable tales of high tragedy such as "The Soul of the Great Bell" and *Kwaidan*, where stories based on folk-tales like "Rokuro-kubi" and "Jikininki" are particularly horrific in their lurid descriptions of supernatural menace. This volume contains the complete text of both of these exquisite books as well as *Chita* and an additional three-hundred pages of vignettes and essays on subjects ranging from Japanese tradition to New Orleans vodoun to a Cincinnati execution. If you fall under the spell of Hearn, there's a plethora of fine readings awaiting you. A small percentage can be construed as horrific, but he was such a fine writer that virtually any subject he tackles becomes fascinating. This book is a great starting point, as is the volume *Fantastics and other Fancies*. The *Selected Writings* can be found in the $20.00 to $40.00 range. Do seek out this introductory volume; you'll see why there are legions

of book collectors eagerly awaiting the opportunity to pay large sums for this remarkable man's work.

Now let's move on to a book that appears to be a mere celebrity tie-in but yields some very pleasant surprises . . .

And the Darkness Falls — edited by Boris Karloff: World Publishing 1943. Oliver Onions, H.P. Lovecraft, de Maupassant, Edgar Allan Poe, Ambrose Bierce, and Algernon Blackwood are the standards, but some pleasant surprises include Joseph Conrad's "The Brute," Hugh Walpole's "The Silver Mask," and three selections by Maurice Level. Also represented are fine selections by Thomas Burke, A.M. Burrage, E.F. Benson, and many others including a rare (at the time) anthology appearance of a fable by Clark Ashton Smith. Now for the embarrassing part, a book of this vast scope and importance should be off the scale of our price range, right? Well not exactly . . . I've recently seen copies offered for as little as $14.50! Nice copies in dustjacket will run $40.00 to $50.00, a copy signed by Mr. Karloff will run substantially more, perhaps $500.00 to $600.00 as Karloff's signature is sought after avidly by film buffs. However as this book contains work by several authors who are represented on our "Top 100" list, we strongly recommend that this be among the first of your acquisitions as it serves as fine introduction to the work of writers such as Level, Burrage, Walpole, and Benson.

Finally we find what may be the bargain book of the century. Hyperbole? Perhaps, but what else to call a book that includes Machen's chilling "The Great God Pan," Oliver Onions' "The Beckoning Fair One," W.W. Jacobs' "The Monkey's Paw" and two of H.P. Lovecraft's best known yarns? I call it indispensable, the publisher calls it:

Great Tales of Terror and the Supernatural — edited by Phyllis Cerf Wagner and Herbert Wise: Random House Modern Library Edition, 1994. This weighty tome is divided into two parts; although we find the horrific both in "Tales of Terror" as well as in the section designated "Tales of the Supernatural." The original edition was released over fifty years ago but can still be found for well under our upper limit of $50.00. This reissue was published at $22.00 and can often be found in discount chains like Half-Price Books for under $10.00.

Any collection that includes M.R. James chilling "Casting the Runes" and Sheridan LeFanu's "Green Tea" is worthy of note; however, in the over one-thousand pages of text we're offered over fifty stories including Lovecraft's novella "The Dunwich Horror." Also present are masterpieces of suspense such as "Leiningen versus the Ants" and Richard Connell's oft-imitated "The Most Dangerous Game" and pieces by such recognizable names as Hemingway, Hardy, & Dickens. Other high points are Edward Lucas White's grotesque "Lukundoo" and F. Marion Crawford's "The Screaming Skull." It's hard to imagine a volume that gives readers such an excellent overview of pre-World War II horror and suspense. There are other classic anthologies from the same time period, most notably Montague Summers' *The Supernatural Omnibus* and the *Not at Night* series, however this book due to its recent reissuing is the most readily accessible and definitely provides the most dread for the dollar . . .

One of the main functions of this column will be to try and provide early warning on new books (or reissues) so that you can obtain them before the difficulties of an exhaustive search are required. I had intended to provide information on the Caliban Press release of a C.D. Pamely collection, but between starting this column and doing revisions, the book has sold out . . . To stay abreast of new releases some resources on the 'net include "Horrornet" (www.horrornet.com) and the newsgroup alt.books.ghost-fiction.

A major new release is the Charon Press edition of R.Murray Gilchrist's *The Stone Dragon*, an exquisite classic of decadent horror that's been long overdue in an affordable edition. E-mail GROTO13@aol.com for details.

Two releases from across the pond are *Chasm* by Stephen Laws and *Vampyhric* by Simon Clark. Both books are receiving a major push from their publishers and are well deserving of your attention. We'll be covering both books at some length next time around . . .

Lastly, a collection by Jack Ketchum from Obsidian Press: *The Exit at Toledo Blade Boulevard* is a book long overdue. Jack Ketchum is one of the most admired writers in the horror genre and the recent successes of his novels *Ladies' Night* and the re-issue of *The Girl Next Door* have demonstrated that Ketchum has finally acquired the rabid following he has so long deserved. If recent history is an indicator, Ketchum books sell out quickly. It's just that simple, buy it now or pay more later. This fifteen-year retrospective of his best short fiction will come to be considered a cornerstone volume of modern horror.

Next time, three authors you've never heard of and why you should read their books and the next British Invasion . . .

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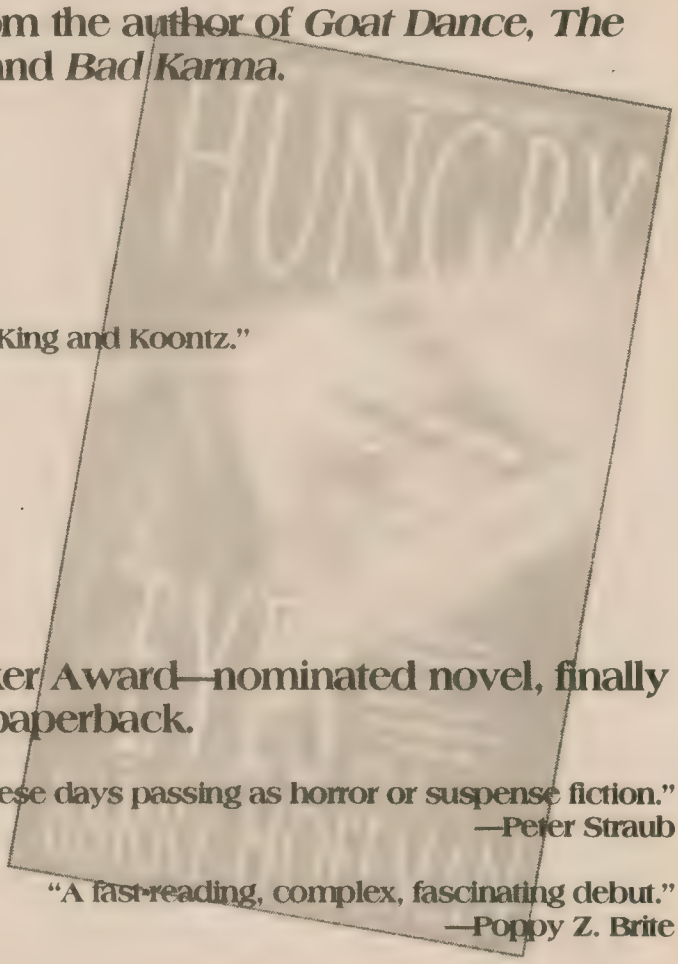

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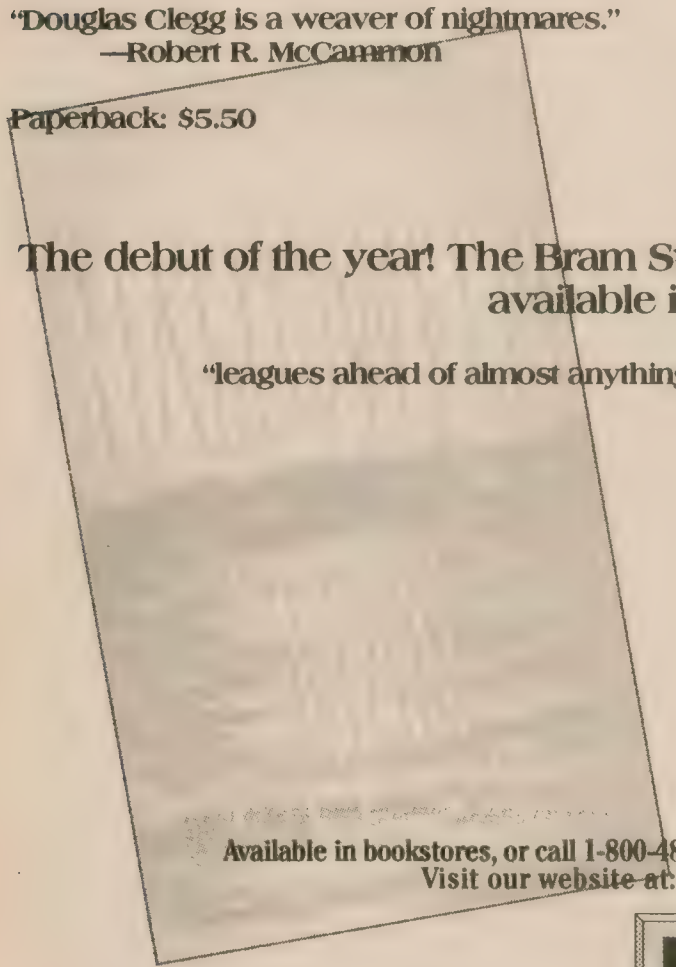

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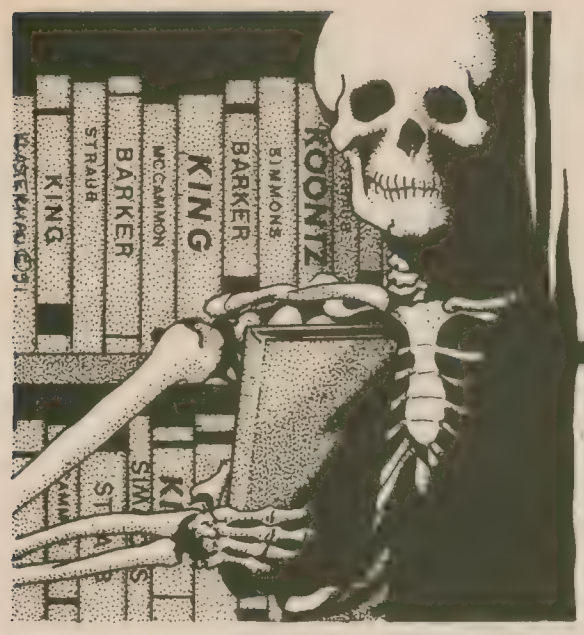


TYSON BLUE

NEEDFUL KINGS & OTHER THINGS

INSTALLMENT 24: STORM OF THE CENTURY PLACES KING IN QUIVERING JEOPARDY!

Stephen King is reading the audiobook release of *Bag of Bones* for Simon & Schuster Audio, and word from King's office is that the reading will be unabridged, welcome news for those of us who prefer to hear the whole thing. The book will be available in two formats; on cassette for around $60.00, and on 20 CDs for around $80.00, both available about the time of the novel's scheduled September release.

King took time off from that chore in April a couple of times, first to appear on Dennis Miller's HBO show, which aired on April 3, 1998. The half-hour show was an R-rated discussion of the two's mutual fear of flying, and was entertaining. Not having had HBO at my house for years, I don't know if Miller's show is re-run, but you can check the ever-popular local listings to see.

King also took a few minutes away from *Bag of Bones* to answer a few of our questions about "Chinga," his foray into *The X-Files*. You'll find that as an article somewhere in this issue. Special thanks to Steve Hockensmith, the editor of *The X-Files Official Magazine*, in which that material appeared in a slightly different format, in the magazine's sixth issue, which went on sale in June. Contact MVP Media Group at 1920 Highland Avenue, Lombard, IL 60248 for information on obtaining copies of the issue, which is available with three covers.

There is more solid information now regarding *Legends*, the new fantasy anthology from Tor, edited by Robert Silverberg. The antho contains King's "Little Sisters of Eluria," a novella set in the Dark Tower universe , and is due in the fall.

Speaking of *Six Stories*, King and the book make a rather unique appearance in Ed McBain's new novel, *The Last Best Hope*, itself a rather unique little book. At one point in the story, a Florida library holds a celebrity auction to raise funds, and one of the featured volumes which is sold is a copy of — you guessed it! — *Six Stories*. The book is described in sufficient detail to let us know that McBain (the mystery pseudonym of novelist Evan Hunter) has at least seen one, if he doesn't have one himself.

King made a visit to the Toronto set of the upcoming six-hour ABC miniseries "Storm of the Century" in February, and while there, was interviewed by Liz Smith. King told Smith that he wrote the teleplay two years ago, before he had ever heard of El Nino, and added that the much-ballyhooed weather system may just be "a Stephen King myth." Thanks to Kingwatcher Tom Mooney of Newport Beach, CA, for passing along the *L.A. Times* appearance of Smith's column, which ran on February 27.

See the accompanying article on my own set visit for more information about the miniseries.

A little more information is available now regarding the film version of *The Green Mile*, which is preparing to begin shooting late this summer in Los Angles and Nashville. The film, produced by Castle Rock Entertainment, is written and directed by Frank Darabont, who ably performed those chores for the fantastic film version of "The Shawshank Redemption." As previously reported, Tom Hanks has been cast in the pivotal role of Paul Edgecombe. Other roles which have been filled at this writing include Graham Greene ("Dances

With Wolves") as Arlen Bitterbuck; David Morse ("The Langoliers", "St. Elsewhere") as Brutal; Bonnie Hunt ("Jumanji", "The Bonnie Hunt Show") as Janice Edgecomb; James Cromwell ("Babe", "Star Trek: First Contact") as the Warden; Patricia Clarkson ("The Dead Pool", "The Untouchables", "Davis Rules" and "Murder One") as the Warden's Wife; and a young actor named Sam Rockwell as Billy the Kid. The role of John Coffey has still not been cast, but Darabont assistant David Johnson reports that a number of unknown actors are being considered at this time.

David Tattersall is the Director of Photography, having performed that chore for "Moll Flanders" and "Con Air." Tom Newman is doing the score.

I recently had an opportunity to read Darabont's screenplay for this film, and it is fantastic. Although some changes have been made to bring the novel to film, they are similar to those done for "Shawshank," streamlining or reworking scenes to make them more cinematic, combining characters to economize screen time, and so on. The essential elements of the story and framing narrative are all there, and the result, if this is close to what is eventually shot, should be a poignant, haunting drama which may well turn out to be even better than "Shawshank" was.

The production is scheduled to begin shooting in July or August, shooting interiors on an LA soundstage, then moving to an abandoned prison in Nashville for the exteriors.

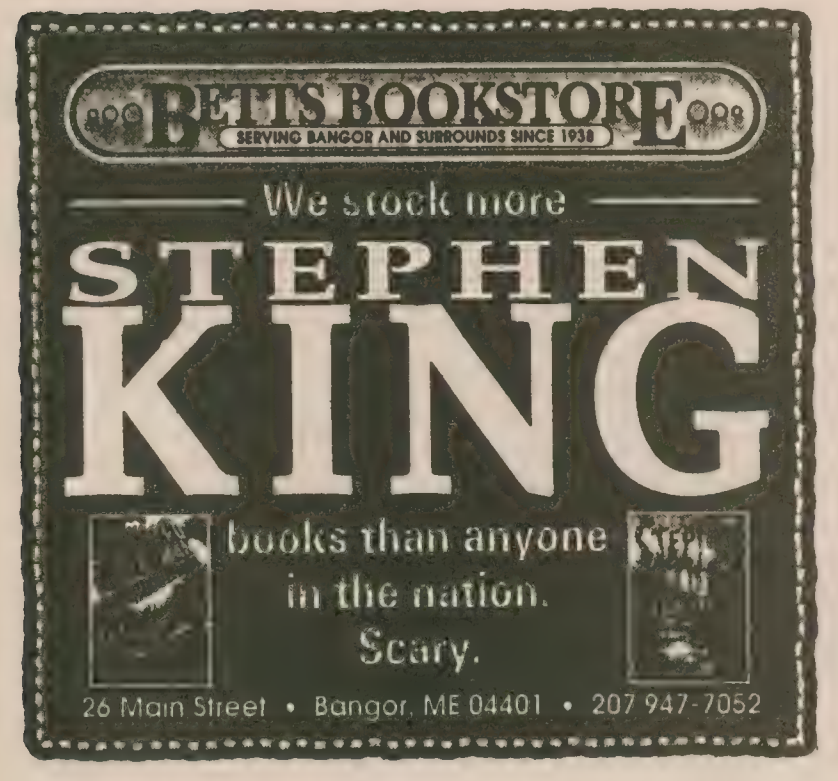
•

On the personal appearance front, King made a second appearance on "Jeopardy" during the show's annual celebrity week, which aired on April 30, 1998. King was up against Howard Stern's sidekick, Robin Quivers, and Regis Philbin.

As with King's last appearance, he made a strong showing throughout the game and came into the finale in the lead. However, he failed to bet enough on his correct final answer, and so was ultimately beaten out by Quivers. Audio portions of the show were played on Stern's nationally-syndicated radio show throughout the preceeding week, and King was complimented by everyone on the show. "Stephen King is smart!" Stern admitted to Quivers at one point, "but you beat 'im! You kicked his ass!"

When King last appeared on "Jeopardy" a couple of years ago, he was playing against David Duchovny, which led to his writing an episode of "The X-Files." Whether this next appearance will lead to his appearance on "The Howard Stern Show" has yet to be seen.

Stephen J. Spignesi returns to the world of King criticism with *The Lost Work of Stephen King*, a lengthy survey of the author's little-known and seldom seen work, including limited editions,



screenplays, nonfiction, etc. The book also features brief contributions from filmmaker James Cole, about his student film version of "The Last Rung on the Ladder," still one of the best student King-films ever, and from myself, a reworked version of my piece about "The Plant," first published in *Castle Rock* and in expanded form in *The Unseen King*, for which it served as cornerstone and inspiration.

The book will be available in several formats. A 1,000-copy signed leatherbound limited edition will be available from the Overlook Connection, as will 52-copy lettered edition as well. Get in touch with Dave at P.O. Box 526, Woodstock, GA 30188 for more info. A trade edition will follow in the fall.

•

Things have been pretty quiet on the Kingwatch front this time around, but there hasn't been much going on outside of King's publishing deal, so that's understandable. There are a few tidbits around, though, so here goes . . .

Lois White of Irving, TX, signs back in with the following question from the January 19, 1998, installment of "Jeopardy": "This Stephen King book in 1980 mentioned an aluminum-coated asbestos cloth cover?" The answer, of course, was *Firestarter*.

Bill Griffith of the Toronto area passed along a short piece from the February 7, 1998 issue of the Canadian *TV Guide*, wherein author Stephen Cole talks about the King "X-Files" episode, its trials and tribulations, etc. Bill also included a short bit from the February 2, 1998, *Toronto Star* on the same subject.

•

Michele Kline checks in from Racine, WI, with a couple of mentions. The first is from the "People" column of the February 9, 1998 issue of *Time*, wherein Chris Rock makes a reference to *Misery*. Also enclosed was a piece from the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* for February 8, 1998, about playwright George Bernard Shaw, whose vision of "creative evolution" is described as "right out of Steven (sic) King and George Lucas." Shaw's plays, coincidentally, are the subject of a yearly theatrical festival in the town of Ontario-on-the-Lake, in Ontario, the town where much of "The Dead Zone" was filmed.

Michele also passed along a story from the April 27, 1998 issue of *Time*, wherein Robert Downey, Jr. reports that during his recent stay in jail, he amused himself by reading Stephen King horror stories.

Frequent Kingwatcher Thomas Mooney, Dean Koontz' neighbor in Newport Beach, CA, sent along a postcard mentioning King's appearance on Dennis Miller's HBO show on April 3, 1998. And if I haven't written to tell you, Tom, yes, I *am* desperate!

So join in the fun, folks! If you run across a mention of King or his work in a magazine or newspaper, or hear it on a TV show or on the radio, send me a copy of **the entire article, plus the cover and contents page, if any**, at the address below. Please **do not** send any articles from *Entertainment Weekly*, as I read that regularly. Contributors will get their names mentioned in the column along with their item. That address is:

Kingwatch
c/o Tyson Blue
4064 County Line Road
Macedon, NY 14502

– CD –

BAG OF BONES

Bag of Bones is romantic suspense novelist Mike Noonan's narrative following his wife's sudden death, and his subsequent affliction with writer's block. Much of it takes place near Derry, at the couple's summer cottage, which Noonan is visiting for the first time since Jo's death four years previous.

He's haunted, by memories of Jo, by the attendant failure to "get on" with his life, and by the building pressures of his inability to work, which he forestalls—one year at a time—by offering his unknowing agent and publisher books written during more productive days.

The bulk of the narrative follows Noonan's resurrection, as he (finally!) begins work on a new novel, and becomes romantically linked with a young widow, Mattie Devore, who's embroiled in a nasty custody fight with her daughter's grossly wealthy grandfather.

Horror? There are ghosts here, and past atrocities. Noonan discovers that his wife, Jo, was researching local history when she died, unearthing incidents the locals would prefer remain undisturbed. Add to this spectral voices he hears at night, and that his refrigerator magnets keep rearranging themselves to offer cryptic messages—and warnings—and I suspect there will be enough to satisfy even the most genre-bound reader.

Ghosts. Atrocities. And not a horror novel? The fantastic elements here are wholly integrated into the narrative, yes, muted yet essential to the way King tells Noonan's tale. They are not, however, the reason for the tale. Think of them as the backbeat. *Bag of Bones* is not King's scariest book, but as a meditation on loss, on the resumption of life and the renewal of purpose, it is without a contemporary peer, and among his very best.

– William K. Schafer

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A VISIT TO THE "STORM OF THE CENTURY" SET

BY TYSON BLUE

A HOT, SNOWY DAY IN TORONTO

There are strange things afoot on Little Tall Island. Outside the Town Hall, a large white clapboard building which might have started its life as a church, cars are parked in jackstraw confusion in the snowy lot. In a grove of trees, a young man on a snowmobile is talking to a woman. Their voices cannot be heard over the wind whipping snowflakes around them.

Suddenly, another woman runs up. Her voice, crying frantically for help, can barely be heard over the sound of the wind. The three huddle together in frantic conversation as the trees whip back and forth around them.

All at once, a voice booms down from above them.

"Cut!" It calls, and the wind falls off. The warm, scratchy snow settles quickly to the ground. The man in shorts and a T-shirt releases the ropes he had been holding, and the trees at the other ends of them stop swaying.

None of this is real, after all. The Town Hall is an empty shell, with only the interiors visible through open doors fleshed out inside. The snow is really bits of shredded plastic grocery bags mixed with pellets of vermiculite, blown about by huge fans. The trees, although real, are mounted on large wooden bases, and can even be moved from place to place if need be.

Above the trees in the misty air, lights glow faintly, shrouded in cloth to diffuse the bulbs' glare. Beyond them, hints of rafters may be seen.

This small piece of midwinter Little Tall Island, Maine, exists in reality in only two places — an abandoned sugar-beet warehouse in Oshawa, Ontario, on the outskirts of Toronto, and the mind of author Stephen King. It is a set for the upcoming ABC miniseries "Storm of the Century," now in final production for a projected six-hour broadcast over multiple nights in February or May of 1999.

"Storm" is unique in a number of ways. It is the first miniseries which King has created especially for television, rather than adapting one of his novels, as he did with *The Stand* and *The Shining*. It is also an international production, with filming taking place in the United States and Canada.

"I've seen this town hall in three different places," explains publicist Bill Bence, who is no stranger to the horror miniseries, having worked with Dean Koontz on "Intensity." "Here in Toronto, and over in Maine, and then there's a scene where everyone goes out front to watch a lighthouse fall down, and that lighthouse is really in Nova Scotia!"

The story is set on Little Tall Island, familiar to King fans as the setting for his novel *Dolores Claiborne*, which was made into a successful film starring Kathy Bates. There is even a reference to Claiborne in the current version of the script, although one never knows what will happen as the miniseries is edited to fit into its time-slots.

In an interesting reversal on the ways things usually go, the script will be published by Pocket Books as a trade paperback, set to appear at about the time the miniseries airs.

Southwest Harbor on Mount Desert Island, off the Maine coast, filled in for the fictitious Little Tall for the production, which worked there back in February '98, when nature obliged with an actual blizzard. Ironically, this was not a good thing, since *real* snow doesn't stop when the director yells "Cut!"

In the story, the residents of the island are battening down for the arrival of the fiercest winter storm on record, and as if that weren't enough, an old woman is senselessly murdered just as the island is completely cut off from the mainland. The islanders come to realize that there is a stranger among them — an evil stranger, who may be more than human, and is definitely evil.

The miniseries stars Tim Daly, best known for his work on NBC's "Wings" and currently on theater screens in "The Object of My Affection." He plays Mike Anderson, a grocer and part-time constable. Deborah Farentino ("Earth 2," "NYPD Blue" and "Wiseguy") plays his wife Molly.

The sinister stranger, Linoge, is played by Colm Feore, best-known to moviegoers as Meg

Ryan's fiance in "City of Angels" and as the face-switching surgeon in John Woo's "Face/Off."

There are a few veterans of previous King-related projects on hand as well. Casey Siemaszko, who played one of the hoods in "Stand By Me," appears as Hatch, Anderson's deputy. Jeffrey DeMunn, the DA in Frank Darabont's "Shawshank Redemption" and currently on view in "The X-Files" feature film, plays Robbie Beals, a self-absorbed citizen of the island.

The script was written by Stephen King, who shares executive producer chores with Mark Carliner, who has helmed "Stephen King's The Shining" with the author in the past, in addition to such projects as "George Wallace" and "The President's Plane is Missing."

Craig Baxley is directing. A stunt coordinator for "Predator" and "The Long Rider," he has helmed "Silencing Mary," "Deconstructing Sarah," and "Twilight Man," among others.

The effects makeup is being handled by Steve Johnson, who won Emmys for his work on "Stephen King's The Stand" and "Stephen King's The Shining." Visual effects supervisor is Boyd Shermis, also a veteran of "Stephen King's The Shining" and "Face/Off."

"Storm" has a huge cast, featuring 65 speaking roles. On the day we were there, none of the principals were shooting. Kathleen Chalfant, Becky Ann Baker and Shawn Doyle were the folks around the snowmobile in the scene which was being shot that afternoon.

The set is amazingly realistic, provided one doesn't look up, or catch sight of someone wandering through the snow out of camera range in shorts. When shooting stops for lunch, it is somewhat jarring to see someone reach over and open up a door in the forest, and to step through into the outside world, going from a blustery winter night into a bright, warm spring day.

From the outside, the warehouse resembles nothing so much as a capsized Noah's Ark, its rounded, peaked roof soaring overhead. In the parking lot outside, cast and crew trailers are clustered around, along with a few piles of real — albeit man-made — snow melting in the sun.

Crew members bustle about, finding places to eat lunch. Cast members who are not shooting sit around in chairs, talking. Jeffrey DeMunn is absorbed in a novel.

The callsheet for this particular day called for seven scenes to be completed before a projected wrap time of 11:00 p.m. Since the scenes being worked on were the first two, and lunch was at 5:00 p.m., things seemed to be going slowly.

Unfortunately, due to time constraints and a later commitment that evening in the U.S., I was unable to stay more than a few hours on the set, and didn't have a chance to do more than observe. But from the little I did see, "Storm of the Century" seems likely to continue the series of successful King miniseries on ABC.

Things were scheduled to be a bit more lively a few days later, as Stephen King was expected to make his second visit to the set, to see how things were going and do a little media promotion at the same time. For now, though, production is moving steadily along, with shooting here and at other studios and locations in and around Toronto. In Tempe, Arizona, miniature shooting is continuing, all aiming toward the early 1999 airdate, when King fans will finally get to see what we did that hot, snowy day in Toronto — plus a whole lot more. — CD —

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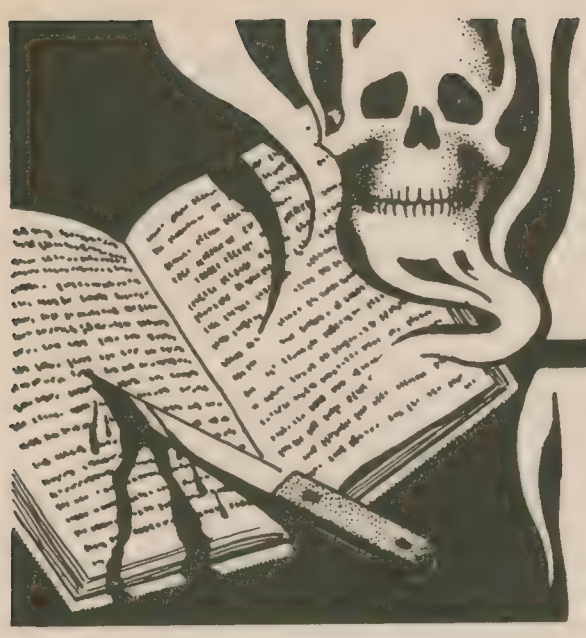

CD REVIEWS

BOOKS, VIDEOS, SOFTWARE...

***Night Prayers*, by P. D. Cacek. Design Image (PO Box 2325, Darien, IL 60561), March 1998, 219 pages.**

P.D. Cacek's latest offering is an entertaining romp that begins like many traditional vampire stories, but we soon learn that this is anything but your typical pulp vampire novel. Cacek takes vampire pop culture convention and turns it on its head. The result is *Night Prayers: A Vampire Novel*, a novel filled with quirky characters and situations sufficiently unlikely that they read like reality.

Allison is thirty-seven, single and looking to score in her local country western bar, the Silver Concho Saloon. She finds Seth, a vampire, and agrees to be transformed, believing all the hype, and dreaming of a storybook life. She soon learns that life is complicated, even for vampires, and that this undead stuff is no quick fix. She ends up in Luci's Fur Pit, a Hollywood strip club staffed entirely by other female vampires who prey on the clientele (in more ways than one) to make a living. She attaches herself to Lucy, the leader of the clan, to further her vampire education so she doesn't get staked. Which brings us to Mica, barker for Luci's Fur Pit by night and proselytizer by day. He believes he's been sent by God to show sinners the path to redemption. His life is a perfect black and white until he meets Allison, who reminds him of the woman he once loved—and walked out on to preach the word of God. When he discovers that Allison, like the rest of his employers and coworkers are all members of the undead, then things start to get really complicated . . . because to save their souls, he has to stake them all, including his new love.

In *Night Prayers*, Cacek introduces contemporary Hollywood as a setting where vampires could plausibly blend into the routine of (night)life. But where we expect creatures of power and beauty, we find vampires whose lives are very like our own—mundane and complicated, though with a few supernatural perks. Cacek's characters are all at once endearing, pathetic, and humorous; their individuality crafted through contradiction. Allison is desperate to get a life, but doesn't want to do it by taking other lives. Mica searches for a way to save mankind, while struggling to forgive himself for the love he abandoned. Blended with moments of supreme irony, it is these moments of contradiction that make the novel.

The story moves along nicely from start to finish. Girl loses boy; boy looses girl; boy finds girl that looks like her but she's a vampire; boy has to decide whether or not to send her to her eternal reward. *Night Prayers* is a witty, enjoyable read which I recommend to vampire story lovers with a taste for the ironic twist.

—Melanie H. Orpen

•

***Dust*, by Charles Pellegrino. Avon, March 1998, 386 pages, hardcover.**

Charles Pellegrino is a real Indiana Jones kind of guy. The bio blurb on the press release for his new novel, *Dust*, describes him as "a paleontologist, archeologist, crustaceaologist, advanced rocket systems designer, and undersea explorer." The man definitely gets around.

While his name might not

sound familiar to you, chances are you have been exposed to his ideas. Did you read *Jurassic Park* or see the movie? You probably did. But did you know the idea of cloning dinosaurs by extracting their DNA from dead mosquitoes trapped in amber was originally conceived by Charles Pellegrino? What about the movie *Titanic*? Pellegrino was intimately involved in the *Titanic* survey project as an undersea archaeologist. What else . . . how about the prediction that oceans might exist beneath the visible surface of planets and moons thought to be "dead"? Pellegrino again, this time wearing his astrobiologist hat (and working with Jesse A. Stoff).

Yes, he has been around the block a few times, but can he write a good novel? Let's see.

Dust begins with a very simple and seemingly innocuous idea: What if most insects suddenly died? Since insects are considered by many people to be nothing more than pests, we might applaud that kind of news. Pellegrino shows us why it is not time to jump for joy. Combining fascinating facts with plausible speculation, the author leads us through the collapse of the food chain and the resultant near destruction of human beings. He never resolves the question of how it all started, but that does not matter. You get so wrapped up in the explanation of *what happens next* that how it began is a meaningless question. And if you don't believe, if some of the descriptions seem outrageous, Pellegrino offers up an appendix wherein he discusses what events in the book were fact-based and which ones were complete speculation. *And* there is even a bibliography so you can check on the author's assertions in case you don't want to take his word for it. The ideas presented in the book are very defensible. That is what makes them so creepy.

All right, so there are a lot of tantalizing ideas in the novel, but is the story any good? Actually, yes. The author is a little weak on characterization, especially at the beginning of the novel, where it hurts most. But if you hang with the story until the end you become acquainted enough with the characters to care about them, and to mourn the loss of the fallen.

The story is very well put together, the pacing is quick sharp. There are many digressions used to fill in the reader on technical or anecdotal information, but they are not boring at all. Far from it. They are one of the things I like most about the book.

Along with all his other accomplishments, can we also call Charles Pellegrino an accomplished novelist? Yes, I think so. *Dust* is an exciting and entertaining book. Highly recommended.

— Wayne Edwards

•

***Portrait of the Psychopath as a Young Woman*, Edward Lee and Elizabeth Steffen. Necro Publications (PO Box 540298, Orlando, FL 32854-0298), May 1998, 292 pages.**

A new novel from Edward Lee, this time with a co-conspirator you might not have heard of before, Elizabeth Steffen. We know who EL is, but what about Elizabeth? According to her author bio, she "works for a law-enforcement agency with the Federal government. She lives on the west coast where she spends all of her free time rescuing stray animals and wayward souls." Hmm. Sounds like an unlikely teammate for the Godfather of Gore, but then *Portrait of the Psychopath as a Young Woman* is not what you might expect from Lee. It is a novel of suspense, not so much "toned down" from his other work as approached from a different perspective. It is refreshing to see him go in this direction. He is very good at it, and whatever synergy is created by the collaboration with Steffen only serves to make the book even better.

The story concerns a journalist, Kathleen, who writes a column described by some as "feminist." She begins to get letters from a serial killer detailing gruesome aspects of the crimes committed. The letters also include "souvenirs" of the victims. It becomes clear that the killer wants Kathleen to write a book about the murders and the murderer. But there's a lot more to the story. There is a specific reason why the serial killer picked Kathleen to be the biographer, and that revelation is enough to bring Kathleen to the very edge of reason. The two have something almost familial in common. But I don't want to spoil it for you . . .

Portrait of the Psychopath . . . is a tightly-wrought tale that moves along at a goodly clip. The characterization and dialogue are sharp, and the attention to detail, even the seemingly picayune, is admirable. There is plenty of content graphic enough to satisfy the most prurient Lee fans but not too much of it to alienate a more mainstream audience. The writing walks a fine line between these worlds with a steady hand and complete confidence.

Necro Publications has another hot book on the market, and Edward Lee puts out for his fans yet again. It is clear to me that *Portrait of the Psychopath* . . . is one of Lee's best efforts to date. The Lee and Steffen combination is an obvious winner. I hope we get to

read more from them in the future. Recommended.

— Wayne Edwards

•

***Santa Steps Out*, by Robert Devereaux. Dark Highway Press, 1998.**

Wayne Allen Sallee said it best a decade ago: "I think our job as horror writers is to ruin the world for everyone else." Robert Devereaux wasn't privy to that, but might as well have been. He's clearly taken Wayne's philosophy to heart, in one of the most perversely hilarious books ever written.

Never before have so many sacred childhood deities been subjected to such vile reinvention, familiar names infused with all the unfamiliar fleshly appetites and personality quirks they can hold. Consider this description of Santa himself, spat by Mrs. Claus in the heat of argument: "You're nothing but a rutting animal, just another overweight hog . . . sniffing at the hindquarters of any sow that trots across his path." This is *not* the jolly Saint Nick you thought you knew.

Santa Steps Out begins as a pornographic *Same Time, Next Year* for cuddly kiddie icons, as Santa engages in a torrid affair with the Tooth Fairy, the object of similar revisionism: she hates kids, eats teeth, excretes coins, and indulges a nymphomania so towering that her actions resound all the way to Heaven. In Santa's defense, he's still got a good heart; he's just driven by genitals that are themselves rather towering. In his vacillations between duty to the world's children and satiating his lusts, Santa is pretty much a typical guy whose brain is engaged mainly in rationalizing his behavior, and can't understand why his wife isn't as delighted as he is when he brings in another woman (this one mortal) to share their happy home.

The deconstructionism gets worse. There's also a voyeuristic, sexually frustrated Easter Bunny who stashes a homemade love doll in his burrow, and a vindictive gangbang between Mrs. Claus and the North Pole's entire elf population. In the low comedy and high drama engendered by Santa's hormones, the players behave like a recast Greek pantheon, driven by the same passions and pettiness . . . apropos, since Devereaux nags his characters with fragmented memories of a prior existence, pre- Christian incarnations as nymphs and satyrs that provide a continuum between their sanitized modern personas and their earthier origins in antiquity. The link between these two eras is none other than God himself, depicted with Gnostic overtones: He bungles His deeds, displays a remarkable lack of foresight, erases free will with a touch of His hand, and may have won His position by usurping it.

For all the ribald humor and naughty goings-on, *Santa Steps Out* is a cynical tale (whose final line beautifully bastardizes Dickens) that flays alive those childhood images used to pacify us and keep us in line, and shows them to be a neutered sham. No less comforting to the tykes, perhaps, but a sham nonetheless.

The likes of Joseph Campbell and Matthew Fox have long called for a new myth suitable for our age. *Santa Steps Out* is likely the last thing they've had in mind, but Devereaux has come as close to furnishing that myth as anyone is likely to for a long time.

—Brian Hodge

•

***Second Coming Attractions*, David Prill. St. Martin's, 256 pp.**

David Prill's first two novels won him a cult following among horror fans who appreciate his warped world view and macabre sense of humor. In *The Unnatural*, embalming took baseball's place as the national pastime. *Serial Killer Days* told the story of a small Minnesota town that actually celebrates the annual visits of a serial killer. This time out, Prill targets the Christian inspirational film industry, with the story of Good Samaritan Films, producers of such epics as *The Man Who Rose Again* and *Three Strikes and You're Saved.*

The main character of *Second Coming Attractions* is Leviticus Speck, son of Good Samaritan founder Noah Speck. Leviticus wonders if the films produced by Good Samaritan are relevant to today's Christian audience. Good Samaritan is not the powerhouse it once was, as evidenced by a declining market share and a challenge from an upstart, Blood of the Lamb Films. This new company produces films with grim anti-abortion messages, usurping markets that Good Samaritan once dominated.

Leviticus, obsessed with his rivals, is willing to do anything to thwart them. Introduced to a hot property that seems tailor made for Blood of the Lamb, Leviticus pretends his studio is interested in the project even though he has no intention of ever making the film. What follows is grim farce, as Leviticus and young screenwriter Nicholas Puckett collaborate on a script for an anti-abortion action film called "The Fetal Detective." The title character (nicknamed

"The Unborn Avenger") is a trash talking, gun-toting fetus who dispatches his pro-choice enemies from the womb.

Once again, Prill creates convincing, sympathetic characters and places them in a world which, though ridiculous, is so fully imagined that readers have to buy in. Along the way, he demonstrates his talent for offbeat, off the wall humor, all the while delivering a message against intolerance and one dimensional thinking. Whether writing about a pistol-packing fetus, a support group for spouses of actors who portray deities, or abortion clinic violence, Prill writes with authority and conviction.

Although Prill comes close to overdoing it at times (naming a character "Una Bonner" made me groan out loud), he walks a fine line without becoming preachy. Nobody writes like Prill, and nobody covers the same bizarre terrain. If Prill were to write a book about watching grass grow, I'd buy it without hesitation, knowing he'd find a way to make it interesting. He's three for three in my book, quite an impressive average—I can't wait to see where he goes next.

—Henry W. Wagner

•

***Darker Angels*, S. P. Somtow. Tor, 384 pp.**

"Stories within stories within stories! And always, it took another story to explain the one that preceded it."

— Paula Grainger,
narrator of *Darker Angels*

Just when you start listening to the pundits who think horror may be in decline, we have a month like February 1998. First, St. Martin's publishes Thomas Tessier's excellent novel *Fogheart*. Next, Tor publishes Graham Joyce's masterful coming of age novel, *The Tooth Fairy*. Completing this literary hat trick, Tor then outdoes itself by issuing *Darker Angels*, S. P. Somtow's most accomplished novel to date.

Paula Grainger is the widow of Rev. Aloysius Grainger. Viewing President Lincoln's body as it lies in state, she encounters Walt Whitman, who is also there to pay his respects. A conversation ensues, and Paula invites Whitman to her home for tea the next day. Paula feels something important has just happened, but doesn't realize the tremendous change she is about to undergo—her chance meeting with Whitman will utterly transform her, as secrets are revealed and lives are irrevocably changed.

Whitman arrives the next day accompanied by his lover, former Union soldier Zachary Brown. Brown tells Paula a story about a past encounter with her husband, and unleashes a torrent of related tales, each illuminating mysteries raised by its predecessor. Zach's narrative is composed of several second hand tales, related to him by the Rev. Grainger, the armless Tyler Tyler, faith healer Jimmy Lee Cox, and a wealthy slaver named Bledsoe. These stories are further amplified by letters from the Reverend to Paula, which in turn reference epistles and diaries from Edgar Allan Poe and Lord Byron.

The stories weave a bizarre tapestry of voodoo, slavery, war, death and resurrection. It dawns on Paula that she is being told these stories for a reason; she eventually realizes that they represent a plea from her husband from beyond the grave. Paula needs the information to make an important decision, which, when made, provides an uplifting and quietly appropriate ending to this fine novel. Along the way, Paula sheds her old life, and, like the zombies that populate this dark fantasy, is resurrected, her mind opened, her sexuality awakened, her path made clear.

Somtow is in total control of his material, deftly combining the fantastic and the historic, expertly melding the numerous subplots he sets in motion. The cascade of stories holds the reader spellbound—each story springs from its precursor and leads into its successor, creating a complex labyrinth which the reader explores with Paula. The book is full of intriguing contrasts—the idea of raising the dead is repulsive, but pales next to the atrocities committed by both sides during the Civil War. In Somtow's world, resurrection can be horrible, but also redemptive, as when Jimmy Lee Cox brings his father back to life and reconciles with him, foreshadowing the book's touching climax.

Rich in character and atmosphere, *Darker Angels* is dark fantasy at its finest, a passionate work that reflects the fierce intelligence of its creator. This book finds Somtow at his creative peak—let's hope he stays there for a long time to come.

—Henry W. Wagner

•

***The Tooth Fairy*, Graham Joyce. Tor Books, 1998, 320 pp.**

Graham Joyce's *The Tooth Fairy*, which recently received a well-deserved British Fantasy Award for best novel, announces its essential nature in the second paragraph of page one. Here, five year old Terry Morris is "offering (his) chubby white feet to the dark

water" of a pond on the outskirts of the British factory town of Redstone when a large pike glides to the surface, severs two of Terry's toes, and vanishes into the depths. For Terry, and for his friends Sam Southall and Clive Rogers, this is merely the first of many encounters with the predatory powers that govern their world. A second incident, equally ominous but much more inexplicable, quickly follows.

Sam Southall loses a baby tooth in the course of a schoolyard scuffle and, in accordance with the time honored tradition, puts the tooth under his pillow. He wakes in the middle of the night to find a creature, which he immediately identifies as the Tooth Fairy, crouched in the shadows of his room. To Sam's astonishment, the Tooth Fairy turns out to be a malevolent, foul-mouthed, and threatening creature which, once discovered, is locked into a strange, symbiotic relationship with Sam that will dominate both of their existences throughout the decade to come.

This creature, which appears initially as a male and then switches genders as Sam passes through puberty, plays a varied and ambiguous series of roles throughout Sam's early life: tormentor, protector, demonic familiar, sexual succubus. Most significantly, the Tooth Fairy appears to be associated, directly or indirectly, with a number of violent and tragic local occurrences: the murder/suicide that destroys Terry's entire family; the disappearance of a sadistic boy scout; the deterioration of a local beauty queen and the subsequent suicide of her abandoned boyfriend; the bomb blast that costs the long-suffering Terry his left hand.

In Joyce's hands, the Tooth Fairy is a literal, if enigmatic, presence, one that, with a few unsettling exceptions, is visible only to Sam, whose insistence on its reality puts him into the periodic care of a concerned, but ultimately helpless, psychiatrist. Once that enigma is established, Joyce treats us to a detailed, often harrowing, portrait of a group of natural born outsiders — the self-christened "Redstone Moodies" — struggling through their adolescent rites of passage toward a coherent sense of self, and toward a sense of their rightful places in a changing world.

At the same time, Joyce addresses the overtly fantastic phenomenon of the Tooth Fairy itself, and of its ambiguous, adversarial relationship with Sam. Is the Tooth Fairy directly responsible for the ongoing string of misfortunes? Is he/she/it the agent of Sam's darkest, most deeply hidden desires? Is it a victim or a victimizer, a cause or an effect, the master of this bizarre relationship or its slave? Sam's attempts to resolve, and eventually dissolve, this relationship parallel his attempts to surmount and survive the obstacles of a difficult adolescence, and Joyce delineates both the supernatural and naturalistic levels of his story with grace and impressive narrative economy.

At its most fundamental level, *The Tooth Fairy* is a story of loss, growth, and the inevitability of painful change. Terry Morris, who stays in Redstone at the novel's end while his friends head out into the larger world, and who suffers the novel's most dramatic losses, has the final word on the subject:

> "... you might not look down your nose at me, and we might talk about the old days, but things will be different between us forever. I know this. All my life I've had to get used to things falling away from me. Life is not something you can keep in your hand. You have to get used to losing things. It's the one I know everything about ..."

In the end, though, beneath its baroque and often painful surface, *The Tooth Fairy* is also a novel about survival, about endurance in the face of almost continuous calamity. It is Graham Joyce's finest novel to date, a large step forward for one of the most individual voices in modern imaginative fiction.

— Bill Sheehan

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***Horror: 100 Best Books*, ed. by Stephen Jones and Kim Newman. Carroll and Graf, New York, 304 pp.**

The recent reissue of Stephen Jones' and Kim Newman's perennially useful reference work, *Horror: 100 Best Books*, is both welcome and long overdue. Originally published in 1988, and now updated to include more extensive contributor biographies and a supplementary reading list encompassing significant horror titles through 1997, the book is an impressively varied compendium of 100 brief essays by 100 different writers, each of whom was given the opportunity to select and comment on a favorite work. The results are frequently surprising and almost always illuminating.

Horror... opens with Clive Barker's essay on Christopher Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* and closes with Jack Sullivan's assessment of Ramsey Campbell's *Dark Feasts*. Selections in between range from the obscure (Jeremias Gotthelf's *The Black Spider*, Alexander Laing's *The Cadaver of Gideon Wyck*, James Hogg's *The Confessions of a Justified Sinner*) to the celebrated (*Dracula, Dr. Jekyl and Mr. Hyde, I Am Legend, Ghost*

Story). Along the way, a number of titles not typically associated with the horror field are also discussed, among them *Macbeth*, *Lord of the Flies*, Melville's *The Confidence Man*, Jerzy Kosinski's *The Painted Bird*, and Walter Van Tilburg Clark's *The Track of the Cat*. As a vehicle for displaying what Ramsey Campbell, in his introduction, calls "the scope of the field and the diversity of its creators," *Horror: 100 Best Books* remains a model of its kind.

In keeping with the partisan nature of the enterprise, the individual contributions tend more toward the personal and the impassioned than the objective and the seriously analytical, and that approach works perfectly well. Especially notable contributions include Peter Straub on *The Shining*, Dan Simmons on John Gardner's very literary *Grendel*, John Clute on the complex pleasures of Tim Powers's *The Anubis Gates*, and Chet Williamson on Thomas Harris's quintessential serial killer novel, *Red Dragon*. And the list goes on.

Completists who own both the original and the expanded 1992 reissue will no doubt want to add this latest and largest edition to their shelves. But I'd like to commend the book particularly to those who missed it in its earlier incarnations, and who will now have the belated opportunity to enjoy, and argue with, one of the most vital and idiosyncratic guides thus far produced by this most vital and idiosyncratic of genres.

— Bill Sheehan

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***The Ten Ounce Siesta*, Norman Partridge. Berkeley Prime Crime, 1998, 254 pp.**

Jack Baddalach, the beleaguered hero of Norman Partridge's 1997 novel, *Saguaro Riptide*, can't seem to catch a break. In his second outing, *The Ten Ounce Siesta*, Jack — a former light-heavyweight champion currently employed as a glorified odd job man for Nevada mob boss Freddy Gemignani — is assigned what should be a reasonably simple task: escorting a bronchitic Chihuahua named Spike from Palm Springs to Las Vegas. Unfortunately for Jack, Spike — the much loved pet of Freddy G's pierced and tattooed granddaughter Angel — is stolen somewhere in the Mojave Desert by a band of leather-clad, machine gun-wielding women who beat Jack senseless, then lock him in the trunk of a hijacked limo with one dead body and one live rattlesnake for company. Clearly, nothing in this man's life is ever simple.

The bulk of the novel is concerned with Jack's efforts to recover Spike and restore his tarnished honor, and is played out with a spirited disregard for such limiting factors as logic and realism. (As a case in point, witness the way Jack escapes from the limo after biting the rattlesnake in half.) Mostly, *The Ten Ounce Siesta* is another freewheeling exploration of one of the most bizarre sensibilities in contemporary suspense fiction.

Among the singular array of characters that arise from that sensibility are Daddy Deke Lynch, a snake-handling, strychnine-drinking, Satan-worshipping eschatologist who channels demons through an albino rattlesnake named Cthulhu and waits for the end of the world in a ramshackle desert hideaway called Hell's Half-Acre; his daughters Tura, Lorelei, and Eden, whose careers include a stint as a sister act in hard-core porn films; Frank Newman, AKA Dr. Gooddoggy, a veterinarian with a connoisseur's interest in lap dancers; and Tony "The Tiger" Katt, the newly-crowned heavyweight champion of the world, a man with a long-standing grudge against Spike the Chihuahua and an image problem recently repaired via a successful penile enlargement.

The novel is filled with vivid, equally singular set pieces, including an unplanned, off-camera bout between Tony the Tiger and Jack Baddalach which leads Jack to consider reviving his moribund boxing career, a shoot-out at Dr. Gooddoggy's which claims the life of Lorelei Lynch and an unfortunate Komodo dragon named Bruce, along with various acts of torture, mutilation, and demon possession that leave Hell's Half-Acre littered with bodies by the novel's end. In every respect, *The Ten Ounce Siesta* lives up to the Ken Russell epigraph which precedes it: "I don't believe there's any virtue in understatement."

Partridge has described this novel as a cross between *Rocky* and *The Hills Have Eyes*. As far as plot goes, that's a fairly accurate description, but it fails to account for the book's peculiar flavor, which is more the result of the author's distinctive voice and highly skewed perspective than of any combination of external influences. In spite of its graphic content and almost effortless sense of vulgarity — qualities that should make Joe Lansdale's fans feel immediately at home — *The Ten Ounce Siesta* is an essentially benign, good-natured, resolutely eccentric novel that is powered by Partridge's obvious affinity — and affection — for the outrageous and the grotesque.

After two consecutive Baddalach novels, it may be time

for Partridge to turn his hand to something that reflects more of the dark side of his nature, just as *Slippin' Into Darkness*, his remarkable first novel, does. Still, it's hard to deny the sheer, exuberant entertainment value of these later books; hard, really, to dislike any novel that contains lines like "Touch my vibrator again, bitch, and I'll kill you" or "Hand over the Chihuahua and no one gets hurt." They just don't write 'em like that anymore. In fact — outside the slightly demented universe of Norman Partridge — they probably never did.

— Bill Sheehan

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***Where Serpents Lie*, T. Jefferson Parker, Hyperion Books, 1998, 448 pp.**

T. Jefferson Parker's *Where Serpents Lie* is the latest in a seemingly endless series of novels written under the imposing shadow of Thomas Harris. This one, the account of a serial kidnapper and the obsessed detective determined to track him down, is a direct descendent of *Red Dragon* that manages, against all odds, to bring its own voice, perspective, and narrative momentum to bear on an overly familiar premise.

As the novel opens, the Orange County Crimes Against Youth division, a sub-unit of the Sheriff's Department founded and run by narrator Terry Naughton, is investigating the kidnapping of two young girls, both of whom were taken from their homes and then subsequently released, unharmed but dressed in old-fashioned white tunics with fragments of snake skin adhering to the fabric. The tape covering the mouth of one of the girls is signed with the word "Horridus," the Latin designation for the western timber rattler. Though both girls appear physically unharmed, Naughton believes that the abductions are the opening moves in an escalating fantasy destined to end in murder, and immediately mobilizes a large-scale manhunt played out in a traditional but effective race-against-time style.

Naughton, self-styled "champion of the little people," is a believable, complexly presented hero. Having himself lost a child in an absurd and heartbreaking accident, he brings an obsessive's energy and single-mindedness to his role as protector of exploited children. Ironically, his ability to function in his chosen role is undermined by the discovery of photographs which show him engaged in sexual acts with a pre-pubescent girl. Suspended, and forced to defend himself against a very convincing frame-up, he continues, with his limited personal resources and in the face of official disapproval, to pursue the enigma of "the Horridus."

The Horridus himself — AKA, among many other names, Michael Hypok — is the focal point of a secondary storyline that effectively counterpoints Naughton's first-person narration. Hypok is a video interviewer for a dating service, a part-time child pornographer, a computer graphics expert, and an amateur herpetologist with a pathology strikingly similar to that of *Red Dragon*'s Francis Dolarhyde. Like Dolarhyde, Hypok was an abused and humiliated child who views his crimes as the necessary preliminary steps to an act of radical self-transformation.

Neither narrative line offers anything particularly new or original but, given the chance, they come together with a force that transcends the familiarity of their individual elements. The investigation is believably and logically constructed. The complex personal circumstances — including domestic tragedy, sexual infidelity, political pressures, and humiliating criminal allegations — within which the embattled Terry Naughton is forced to operate are made painfully immediate. The suspense is artfully maintained and the prose, particularly in the latter stages of the novel, positively hums with energy and a sense of personal urgency. The supporting details — such as a series of Crichton-like disquisitions on the arts of digital image enhancement and electronic forgery — are genuinely interesting and nicely integrated into the story.

And then, of course, there are the snakes. Parker speaks powerfully to the primal, not quite universal fear that snakes evoke, engaging this particular phobia more graphically than any novel since George Ernsberger's *The Mountain King* or Alan Scholefield's *Venom*. *Where Serpents Lie* is a virtual mother lode of creepy and fascinating snake lore that features a large and varied serpentine cast and contains a couple of truly unsettling set pieces, including the murder, by knife and timber rattler, of an unsuspecting park ranger and a climactic confrontation with a thirty foot, 500 pound anaconda that has just been interrupted in the act of swallowing a five year old child.

Parker, an underrated suspense writer whose earlier work includes *Little Saigon* and the excellent *Pacific Beat*, shrewdly sets such over-the-top sequences against a backdrop of quieter, considerably more subtle pleasures. In his less operatic moments, he has much to say about guilt, the lingering aftereffects of grief, and the plight of children damaged by an uncaring adult society. These

observations, more than all the furious melodrama that surrounds them, give *Where Serpents Lie* its final, surprising emotional weight, making it something more than the derivative entertainment it might have become in less honest, ambitious, or capable hands.

— Bill Sheehan

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***St. James Guide to Ghost, Horror, and Gothic Writers*, edited by David Pringle. St. James Press, 1998, 750 pg. hardcover.**

St. James Press has finally seen fit to publish a *Guide to Ghost, Horror, and Gothic Writers*, a companion volume to their previously published *Guide to Fantasy Writers* (1996) — and, to a lesser extent, to their *Guide to Science Fiction Writers* (1996) — and it should be a most welcome addition to library and genre scholars' collections.

The guide follows the established St. James approach where each entry contains a brief biography, a complete list of works, and a signed critical essay. Most of the contributors do an exceptionally fine job of summarizing and analyzing their subjects' work, but a few are notable for doing less stellar jobs. In a couple of cases, contributors ramble on exceedingly over authors who have one or two books to their credit, while in one other case, an essayist who contributes several pieces to the guide utilizes a cookie-cutter approach, basically regurgitating plot summaries while offering little or no true insight. Fortunately, as is hopefully clear, these subpar contributors are decidedly in the minority. Indeed, the list of contributors includes such distinguished names as Mike Ashley, Stefan Dziemianowicz, David Langford, S.T. Joshi, and Jack Adrian.

The contributors assess over 450 writers, including 25 foreign-language authors. Given that literally thousands of writers have tried their hand in the genre, some very tough choices obviously had to be made regarding whom to include. Editor Pringle made the selection process slightly easier by wisely choosing not to redundantly cover several writers who were covered in the companion *Guide to Fantasy Writers*, such as Henry Kuttner, Tanith Lee, Barry Pain, Karl Edward Wagner, and Manly Wade Wellman (although their exclusion means that libraries and hard core scholars will obviously want to have the *Guide to Fantasy Writers* as well).

It's perhaps too easy to criticize the choices that were made, but I can't just gloss over the issue, since some of the decisions can only be considered puzzling. For example, I'm not sure how one could justify including Jessica Palmer while excluding William F. Nolan. Or including Tim Stout while excluding Brian Hodge. A few other surprising inclusions: Scott Bradfield, Ron Dee, Mark Frost, T.L. Parkinson, Ken Wisman, and Steve Zell. A few of the more surprising exclusions would be: A.C. Benson, John Dickson Carr, Jere Cunningham, David Drake, Davis Grubb, R. H. Malden, E.G. Swain, and Howard Wandrei. There's also a slight British bias to the selections, which is not surprising given that editor Pringle and several contributors hail from the UK.

In the end, it's all just fodder for debate. There are few if any truly *glaring* omissions, and relatively few incomprehensible inclusions. *St. James Guide to Ghost, Horror, and Gothic Writers* is a valuable addition to genre scholarship, containing a wealth of useful information. It's not inexpensive, but the pricing is in line with the norm for publications intended for the library market, and the sturdy binding and boards ensure that the book will hold up to years of browsing.

— Bob Morrish

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***Science Fiction, Fantasy, & Weird Fiction Magazine Index (1890-1997)*, by Stephen T. Miller & William G. Contento; CD-ROM; $49.95.**

***The Locus Index to Science Fiction (1984-1997)*, by Charles N. Brown & William G. Contento; CD-ROM; $49.95.**

Locus Press; P.O. Box 13305; Oakland, CA 94661

These two recently-released CD-ROMs provide a wealth of information, some of which was previously available only through widely disparate sources, and much of which was previously unavailable in any form.

As Sam Moskowitz says in his Introduction:

> This compendium...updates all previous such bibliographies, and prints complete contents in chronological order as well as by author and title. But where it stands utterly unique is in addition, recording the contents of perhaps hundreds of semi-professional and amateur publications which carried an important regimen of fantasy fiction.

The sheer mass of information covered in *SF, F, &WF Magazine Index* alone is somewhat staggering: more than 900 magazines, 13,000 issues, 21,000 authors, and 75,000 stories are covered. Publications included extend from *A.*

Merritt's Fantasy Magazine to The Zone; authors range from Vance Aandahl to Jim Zychowicz. The disk includes indexes for: Magazines, Listed by Title; Stories, Listed by Author; Stories, Listed by Title; and Cover Artists.

In his Preface, co-creator Stephen T. Miller summarizes his motivation for putting together this massive body of work:

> I...bought every index, checklist and encyclopedia that I could find... Why [hadn't] anyone done an exhaustive index? That question...bothered me for decades and led me here in a roundabout way.

Miller goes on to explain the philosophy used in compiling the information:

> Traditional definitions of science fiction were just too narrow and exclusive. Do they include horror? Weird menace? Hero pulps? Are we limited to American magazines? ...Where should the lines be drawn? Here they are drawn very broadly...The general philosophy here is one of inclusion. It is felt to be better to give too much data than too little.
>
> You will find magazines here that can be found no place else. We give you data on magazines that were never published but that were assembled. We cover the rarest of the rare and the obscurest of the obscure... Important rare fanzines are listed. It's all here. I can rest easy now because what I wanted finally does exist. Thank God, it's finally done.

Well, not quite. As Miller adds: "Each year an updated version of the index will be published on CD-ROM containing new entries for the previous year and any corrections to the index."

With the *SF, F, &WF Magazine Index*, you can check out the contents of acclaimed or notorious magazines that are virtually impossible to find — like, say, the four issues *of From Beyond the Dark Gateway*, or issue #1 of *Frighteners*, which was pulled from distribution due to an over-the-top story by Graham Masterton – or see a list of all stories to appear in genre periodicals by a favorite author. The disk is very well cross-referenced, with hyper-links that allow you to jump from a mention of an author or periodical to the main entry for that subject. As with any research tool that covers such a huge body of information, there are occasional errors or omissions. For example, glancing at the entry for *The Scream Factory*, a magazine I co-edited for 14 issues, I found the other former editors' names listed, but not my own. And whereas the complete contents were listed for the first six issues, only fiction was indexed for subsequent issues.

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The Locus Index to Science Fiction (1984-1997) consists of an index to all science fiction, fantasy, and horror books, magazines, and stories published since 1984, and this information has been merged with the *Index to Science Fiction Anthologies and Collections*, which indexes all science fiction anthologies and single-author collections published before 1984.

In addition to the types of indices included in the *SF, F, & WF Magazine Index*, the *Locus Index* includes indices of Books, Listed by Author; Books, Listed by Title; and Publishers. There are also sections on Book and Magazine Statistics, and the Locus Awards. The period covered by the *Locus Index* – 1984-1997 – is obviously much more limited than that of the other disk, but the explosion in SF publishing through the '80s and '90s makes this disk highly useful as well. In addition, the more wide-ranging information on SF anthologies and collection dovetails nicely with Mike Ashley and William Contento's anthology research volume, *The Supernatural Index* (Greenwood, 1995).

On both of these disks, the information is provided in standard HTML format, and can be accessed using any standard web browser, such as Netscape Navigator, on both the Windows and Macintosh platforms.

Despite the overall high marks I give these two disks, I do have a few suggestions for future versions, mostly having to do with ease of navigation. For starters, it would be helpful if there were alphabetical Table of Contents links across the top of each section's first page, so that, for example, one could be on the first page of the "Magazines, Listed by Title" section and click on "S" to jump to the top of the S listings.

In addition, a global search engine would be nice, so that one could enter an author's or publication's name in a dialog box in order to jump directly to their entry, rather than having to navigate through as many as three or four screens to get there. Finally, combining both indices on one CD-ROM (there's sufficient disk space to do so), with links between the two would also be very useful (so that, for example, one could be browsing the list of an author's short stories published in magazines, and jump to a list of the author's anthology appearances).

Nonetheless, these are minor quibbles that hardly serve to detract from incredibly useful tools. Scholars, researchers, collectors, and plain old fans in search of a browsing good time should thank Messrs. Miller, Contento, and Brown for their efforts.

— Bob Morrish

***Darwinia*, by Robert Charles Wilson. Tor, 1998, 320 p.p., $22.95**

Alternate history novels have become a staple of science fiction. What if the South had won the Civil War? What if Napoleon had airplanes? What if Adolf Hitler hadn't been gassed in WWI and used chemical warfare in WWII? What if Hitler had been a successful painter or Castro had been a successful baseball player? And so on and so on. Most of these efforts inspire yawns and little else.

But Robert Charles Wilson, who has been quiet since 1994, when his most recent novel, *Mysterium*, won the Philip K. Dick Award for best paperback original, has taken this subgenre to a new level with *Darwinia*.

Eight years have passed since 1912, when, on the eve of World War I, all of Europe reverted to an antediluvian state, perhaps to a state it had never known. In any case, the people are gone, and what is left is primordial jungle, complete with poisonous flora and bizarre and dangerous fauna.

Guilford Law leaves America, which has been unaffected by the change and takes his beautiful wife and young daughter to what was once England, where they will stay with relatives who are among the first settlers of this untamed land, while he goes on a National Geographic assignment to photograph the changes on the continent.

As Law faces adventures, he begins to see himself as he would have been, a casualty, shot to death in the World War. His doppelganger/ghost begins to unravel the mystery of what has happened and is happening in the universe.

It takes Guilford a long time to come to grips with the knowledge that one of the two of them is only a copy, and he may not exist at all. He must also face the fact that changes in Europe are only a symptom of horrors to come, unless he can stop them.

He and his ghost must work together or all of the universe will find a fate far worse than the changes which befell Europe a decade earlier.

To put it simply, Robert Charles Wilson is a damned good writer regardless of the genre. When I reviewed *Mysterium*, I said Wilson's prose reads like a combination of Arthur C. Clarke and Stephen King. Throw in Philip K. Dick and you get *Darwinia*. I hope I don't have to wait another four years for the next one.

— Mark Graham

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***The Science-Fantasy Publishers: A Bibliographic History (1923-1998)*, by Jack Chalker and Mark Owings; CD-ROM; $49.95. Mirage Press; PO Box 1689; Westminster, MD 21158**

This is the latest incarnation of the Chalker/Owings volume, which, through very occasional comprehensive editions and supplements, aims to document and comment upon the smaller presses. Here you'll find names like Arkham House, Hypatia, Silver Salamander, yes, Cemetery Dance, and even Subterranean Press. Honesty dictates that I mention that I am the editor/publisher of that last imprint, and have not always been free from the authors' blunt opinions.

Sprawling over 600 pages, this book has migrated to CD-ROM for the current edition, and is accessed using Adobe Acrobat's free Reader. It's as readable as one could expect it to be on a computer screen, and Adobe's search features are a welcome addition.

The individual publisher's listings make up the bulk of the book. Each imprint is given its own section, complete with its logo, ISBN prefix, and a book by book bibliography with commentary. Taken as a whole, the authors' opinions are a textbook primer on how to run a small press. They document the disappearance of Dark Harvest, and the crash and burn by overextension of Pulphouse (which *still* owes me money for a number of books I ordered.) Many publishers could have benefitted from reading this, and recognizing common errors *before* entering the small press fray with wallets open.

It's in the specifics that Chalker and Owings have their most frustrating failings.

Far too frequently, titles, authors, print runs, and even books listed under publishers are slightly inaccurate or just plain wrong. In one single page of their listing for my press, for example, I found no fewer than four factual errors which would have been impossible had they read our promotional flyers carefully. Far, far more serious is their attribution of Lawrence Block's *The Specialists* to Jim Seels of A.S.A.P. Publishing. For the record, this title, a '70s paperback original, was republished in hardcover by James Cahill, and is marred by perhaps the single worst interior design imaginable. (Cahill used the pages from the paperback, magnifying the fuzzy type until it's merely the sum of its faults, and unreadable.) Chalker and Owings owe Seels an apology for linking his name with this, just as Cahill owes Block and cover artist Phil Parks one for so grossly mishandling their work, and associating them with such a poor excuse for craftsmanship.

Don't read *The Science-Fantasy Publishers* for the specifics. As a bibliographic history, it has serious deficiencies. As one which documents an ongoing phenomenon, it paints the big picture in broad but fascinating strokes, and comes recommended, with all its warts, as the only game in town.

—William K. Schafer

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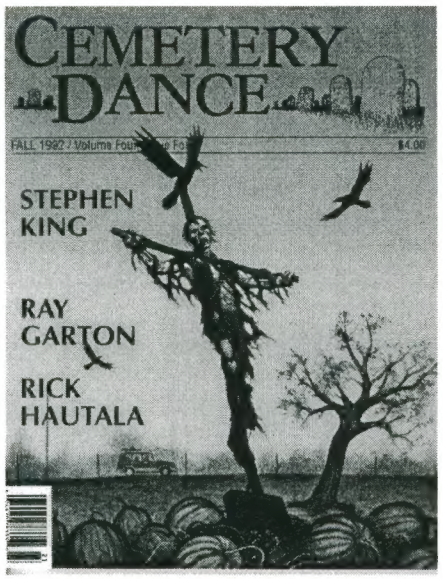

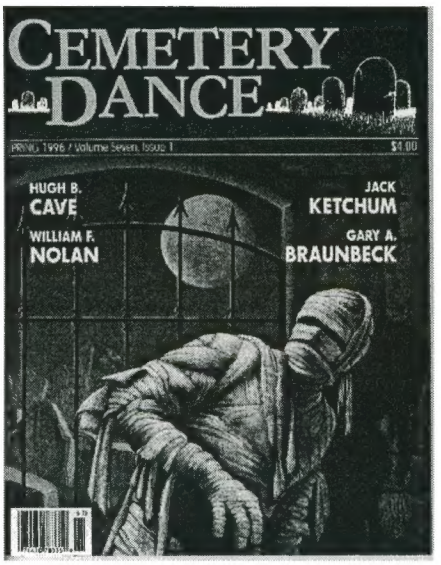

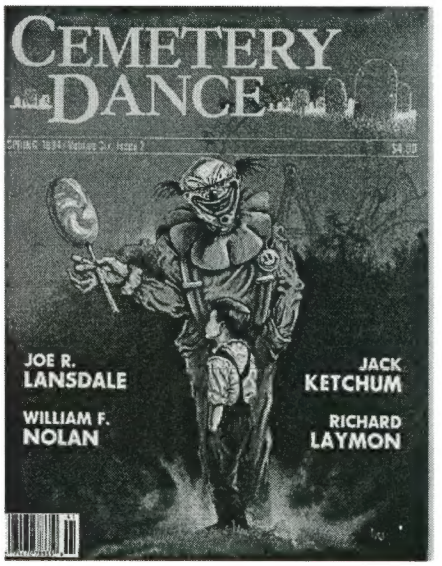

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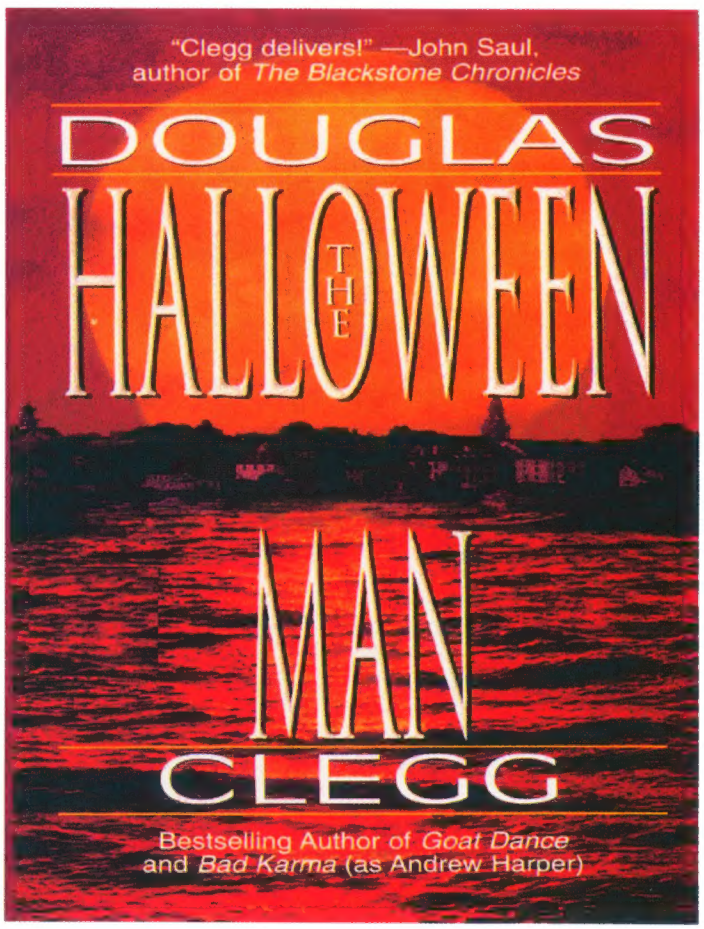

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